VEDANTA FOR ALL

Swami Satprakashananda

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Publisher's Note

Today Vedanta has become a magic word. People speak of Vedanta casually, even as they speak of the weather, however little they know about it. Many claim that what they say or do is in accordance with Vedanta, which has become almost a status symbol. To profess ignorance of Vedanta is considered akin to admitting ignorance about the computer.

This is a rather recent development in the West. In India, on the contrary, Vedanta has been current coin with the masses and the classes from time immemorial. They look upon Vedanta as a lofty way of life. But with a proviso. It is pointed out that its very loftiness puts Vedanta beyond the reach of the common folk. It is a case of *Bhaya-Bhakti*, reverence laced with fear. If a youngster takes an interest in Vedanta the elders tell him that Vedanta is other–worldly and pursuing it must be reserved for the evening of one's life. Respect Vedanta but be cautions about practising it in everyday life.

This misconception about Vedanta in the East and its near-total ignorance in the West were removed when Swami Vivekananda thundered

from the platform of the Parliament of World Religions at Chicago in 1893. The brilliant trail that Swami Vivekananda brazed has been joyously followed by many renunciates and thinkers in India and abroad. Swami Satprakashananda of the Ramakrishna Order did yeoman service through his lectures, articles, and books to spread the saving message of Vedanta for more than four decades in the States. His exposition of the subtle nuances of the Vedantic approach was always charming and reader-friendly. Without compromising the Eternal Principles he could present abstruse concepts captivatingly.

The present volume is a collection of his class talks on different aspects of Vedanta. In an almost conversational tone he discusses the why and wherefore of morality, the role of the spiritual teacher, the aura of meditation, the dichotomy of good and evil and the reconciliation between Divine Grace and the Law of Karma. He explores also the enigma of Maya, the interrelation between reason, volition and emotion, the use of symbols, the significance of spiritual visions, the power of mantras, and the million-dollar question of what happens after death.

In fine, the book is not only 'Vedanta for All', but also 'All about Vedanta'. A diligent study of this book is bound to provide satisfying

solutions to all the problems of the reader, material, moral and spiritual.

We are thankful to Mr. Ray Ellis, a disciple of the Swami, for compiling and editing the class talks and also donating generously to subsidize the price of the book.

—Sri Ramakrishna Math, Chennai
July, 2001

The Author

Swami Satprakashananda was born at Dacca, Bengal, in 1888. He had the blessing to see Swami Vivekananda in 1901 when the great Swami visited Dacca. From 1905 he was instrumental in developing the work of the Ramakrishna Math & Mission at Dacca. He met Swami Brahmananda in 1908 and was initiated by him. After completing post-graduate studies from Calcutta University he joined the Order. He received Sannyasa from Swami Shivananda. He was Assoc. Editor of the Prabuddha Bharata for 3 years. He was in charge of the New Delhi Center for 6 years. In 1937 he was sent to Providence, R.I., U.S.A., where he lectured there and in Washington, D.C. In 1938 he established the Vedanta Centre in St. Louis where he remained until his passing in 1979 at age 91.

Swami's scholarship and deep spirituality enabled him to write numerous learned books and articles. Some of the books include, *Methods of Knowledge; The Goal & The Way; The Universe, God & God-Realization; Meditation : Its Process,*

Practice & culmination; Hinduism & Christianity; Sri Ramakrishna's Life & Message in the Present Age". Some of the pamphlets are *Ethics & Religion & World Peace-How?*

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CHAPTER 1

The Way of Vedanta

Vedanta is the religion and philosophy lived by the Hindus of India. The word 'lived' is used because Vedanta is particularly a way of life founded on philosophical knowledge and spiritual illumination. In Vedanta, religious practice, philosophical inquiry, and mystical awareness are very closely allied. It is a very complete system. It is not founded on the authority of any historical person. It is based on eternal spiritual truths which hold under all circumstances, which underlie and explain all religious doctrines and experiences.

One basic urge has motivated the Hindu mind. The Vedic teachers have grappled with such fundamental questions as how to overcome death, how man can go beyond all bondages and sufferings, how to attain perfection, and to reach That by knowing which there remains nothing to know; by attaining which there remains nothing more to attain; and by loving which there

remains nothing more to love. Therein, they have found Truth eternal.

In the Upanishads there is a story to illustrate this: A Brahmin youth was sent to school at the age of 12. In those days the pupil used to live with the teacher in the hermitage. For twelve years he studied the Vedas and various branches of knowledge. He returned home at the age of twenty-four. His father noticed that he was very conceited, very proud of his learning. One day his father asked him the question: "Well, my boy, you seem to be very proud of your learning. True knowledge gives you humility, but it has produced in your case a different effect. Did your teacher instruct you on That by knowing which the unknown becomes known, the unheard becomes heard, the unseen becomes seen. "I have not heard such instructions. How is it possible?" "You see if you know one lump of clay you know the essential nature of all of them, because in each of these forms made out of the lump of clay is one essence. So this universe has one essence which is very fine being."

Still the boy did not understand. The father told him: "Please bring a fruit of the fig tree. When the boy brought the fig, the father told him to break it, then asked him: "What do you

see?" "I see seeds, tiny seeds." Then the father told him, "Break a seed and what do you see?" "I don't see anything inside." "What you don't see, that is the inner essence. In the seed that inner essence is the vital principle. That enables or makes the seeds sprout and develop into a big tree. Similarly, the whole universe has one inner essence, the very being of the universe. It is the one Self of all things and beings. In that Self, in that inner essence, the whole universe is supported. That sustains and manifests the whole universe."

In fact, this whole multiplicity is permeated and penetrated through and throughout by one Reality. That Reality is not a material entity, but is of the very nature of Consciousness, Self-shining, Awareness Itself. It is the very blessedness of Existence, the innermost Essence of Existence which pervades this manifold universe, Pure Consciousness, Pure Being, Pure Bliss. This is the first truth.

The second truth is that your innermost Self is identical with that Supreme Being. The Self of the universe is the Self of each and every one of you. The father told the son: "That subtle essence, the Self of the universe, the Being of each and everyone of us, that subtle essence also forms the very centre of your personality."

These are the two fundamental principles on which Vedanta is based: that Existence is One; and that that Existence is the ideal Existence. This world in which we live, however real it may appear to be, does not appeal to us as an ideal existence, or ultimate reality. Vedanta says, "Yes, there is an ideal Existence, the very Perfection of Existence, in and throughout everyone, immanent in this whole creation. That Supreme Principle, immanent in the universe is the Spiritual Principle, dwelling within you as the indwelling Spirit. Vedanta holds that these are the two principles, eternal principles, that underlie all religious doctrines and practices, and explain them all.

Vedanta lays great stress on the truth that this human soul is immortal, and is one with the Divine Being, the Supreme Self. This is the very secret of life's development. Your real growth is from inside. It is the very secret of your physical strength, of your intellectual enlightenment, of your spiritual freedom. All growth is simply the unfoldment of the Perfection, of the Spirit within you. Education is, properly speaking, the manifestation of the perfection already in you, and religion is the manifestation of the Divinity already within you.

You could not grow simply by taking advantage of external conditions. If you don't

have the inner vitality to grow, if you do not have the quality to live, no amount of food or drugs can enable you to live and glow. You acquire knowledge simply because you have the capacity to know, not because you read books, or listen to lectures. It is the inner potentiality for receiving knowledge, it is the inner potentiality to have spiritual knowledge, the inner potentiality to develop physically. It is the inner potentiality that enables you to grow intellectually, morally, and spiritually. If you deny this secret you cannot explain the very principle of unfoldment or self-development. The whole of religion is based on this truth.

Vedanta says: "You are That." It can be resolved into two identities: you are He; you are His. All theistic religions cultivate the second formula: I am His. He is the father, I am the child; He is the Master, I am the servant. He is the beloved, I am the lover; He is the lover, I am the beloved.

Vedanta holds that the Ultimate Reality is One. The whole existence is unbroken. There is no division anywhere in the physical realm, the intellectual realm, the spiritual realm. It is one existence. So it is said: "The Reality is One." That Supreme Reality holding this multiplicity is not affected by that multiplicity. It penetrates

everything, but nothing can penetrate It. Actually, nothing in this world that we perceive by the senses, has absolute existence. In the absolute sense That alone exists. Everything else has conditional existence.

Even the physical scientists will tell you the whole universe is a mass of energy. Everything is completely reduced to some kind of energy. So that energy, from the physical standpoint, is the fundamental reality which upholds everything. If physical science can uphold this kind of truth without self-contradication, Vedanta can go farther and say what you call energy is basically Existence, which holds everything. All these are nothing but spiritual Reality in external garb. If that energy to which everything can be reduced, according to physical science, can exist here in a particular garb, why not that spiritual Reality present itself to us in a certain garb? This manifold has a conditional existence, but the absolute Reality is one, Self-shining, pure, free, all-blessedness. So that Reality is transcendental and, at the same time, as long as this experience of manifoldness continues, it is immanent in this manifoldness. That energy which is the ultimate nature of everything according to physical science, is immanent in all these forms. Similarly, that Reality is immanent in this manifold

universe. This means, It is transcendental and immanent. So, the Supreme Reality, God, has two principal aspects, according to Vedanta. He is the Impersonal, Absolute Being, formless, featureless, as well as being immanent in the universe as the one Supreme Self, and as the very Soul of the universe It guides and shifts Its course from within.

In the very beginning of spiritual life God may seem to be very far from us. Actually, God is the Self of the universe. Nothing is external to God. He alone exists. So nothing can exist apart from Him, independently of Him. He includes everything, but all the variations cannot affect His transcendental nature. So that transcendental, Supreme Being, immanent in the manifoldness as the Supreme Self, is the creator, the manifestor of the universe. He is the maintainer, the preserver of the universe. He manifests the universe from within Himself. Actually, it is the manifestation of the Divine Energy. The Divine Energy is the causal potentiality of the whole universe—the whole universe arises out of Divine Energy. He is the transcendental Being; He is the Self of the universe. He is also the creator, and preserver of the universe. He is also the indwelling spirit in each and every living being. So one Supreme Being has different powers.

Vedanta holds that the goal of life is the realization of God, the Supreme Reality. Vedanta has set down a course of life consisting of moral principles, social duties, and religious practices. None of these is considered to be the be-all and end-all of life, however. The goal of life is neither intellectual comprehension nor austerity, neither charity, nor ceremonial worship or devotional practice. All of these have their due places in the scheme of life, according to Vedanta, but all these are subservient to the one ultimate goal of life, God-realization.

This realization is possible of attainment by anyone, if one can fulfil the necessary conditions. It is not the special privilege of any class of people. It is not that realization was possible centuries ago but not in the modern materialistic age. Not so. Just as it was possible for anyone to realize the Supreme Being then, similarly, it is possible for anyone to realize the Supreme Being now. Yes, even in this life, while in this body, one can reach that Supreme, the Goal. Of course, you have to fulfil certain conditions. If you want to attain success in any sphere of life, you have to fulfil conditions.

Vedanta holds that though the ultimate goal is the same for all of us, the ways differ according to our equipment and conditions of life;

according to our tendencies too. If you want to reach a mountain top and you are placed at different levels on the mountain side your ways will differ according to your position and capacity. Some may choose a very steep course and go straight to the top. Some may choose a roundabout way. Similarly, in order to reach the summit of life, we have to consider not only the goal, but also the present situation with such questions as: what is our physical, moral, intellectual, and spiritual status? That will determine our way. Of course, we cannot deviate from the framework of the fundamental principles, that is, you must try to cultivate inner purity and devotion to the Ideal. These two fundamental principles differ according to individual capacity, and tendencies, and conditions of life, but these variations must be within the framework of the two fundamental principles—inner purity, and also devotion to the Ideal.

More or less, every spiritual aspirant has to fulfil these two conditions whatever way he may choose. Vedanta says that according to our inner nature, some may choose the way of activity, growing through discharge of the duties of life, social, and domestic. Or he may choose the way of devotion which is based upon the consciousness of one's relationship with the

Divine Being. You cannot have real spiritual relationship with the Divine Being unless you are akin to God. If you are just a material something, subject to growth, decay, and death, what relationship can you have with God? You can have a true relationship with God if you are also Spirit. Vedanta says that this is the very basis of spiritual life—this truth that you are akin to him. Just as he is immortal, eternal Spirit, so you also are Spirit essentially. You are not a mere physical or psycho-physical being.

Some may choose the path of action; some the path of devotion. Then some may choose the path where great emphasis is laid on the discrimination between the real and the unreal, the finite and the infinite. They generally follow the approach of the path to the Impersonal Absolute Being. That approach is characterized by the consciousness of the identity of the spiritual Self with the Supreme Being.

The other path, the path of devotion, is characterized by the sense of relationship between the individual soul and the Supreme Self. Here there is a distinction between the individual soul and the Supreme Self. The Supreme Self is represented by the boundless ocean, and the individual Self by the wave of that ocean. There is always distinction. In the other approach, which is very

steep, and which very few can follow, there is a sense of identity. This individual self, though there is to all appearance distinct from the Supreme Being, in the last analysis is identical with it. In Vedanta we find various approaches to the Supreme Being.

Vedanta views different religions as so many ways to the same goal. Vedanta does not antagonize any religion. Vedanta takes the position that the same God can be viewed by individual minds in different ways. There are sure to be various conceptions of God. The human mind can conceive of God according to its capacity. It cannot create any God. The Hindus may conceive of God in one way. Mohammedans in another way, the Christians in another way, the Jews another way. Each of these conceptions can lead the spiritual aspirant to the ultimate goal.

As the aspirant advances in spiritual life his understanding of spiritual truth also develops. His conceptions change until the Supreme is realized. Until then he is bound to be in the realm of ideas and conceptions. But each and every view of God helps him to reach God, if he is sincere. He cannot have a complete idea of God as long as his mind is not ready for this. For example: You can have many photographs of this house from different angles, but none of these

photographs will be a complete picture of the house. Still, each picture will stand for the whole house. Similarly, your view of God may be very partial, but even that view of God stands for the entire God.

Whatever conception you may form of God according to your mental capacity, that very conception will help you to move towards God if you are sincere. But if you want to reach God quarrelling about the conceptions, then it will take you a long time to reach the Goal. So Vedanta does not quarrel about the conceptions. Vedanta wants to see if you are anxious and eager to reach the Goal, instead of quarrelling about the way. The way is not a safe place to live forever. Vedanta does not make any converts in the ordinary sense. To Vedanta, real conversion is the transformation of the inner nature, lifting a person from a lower to a higher plane. You cannot be converted in the true sense simply by a kind of external purification, changing of name or dress. Vedanta says whatever you may have, if it is worthy of the name religion—and in these days the word "religion" is used very loosely—it is something that will lead to the Supreme Goal, otherwise it is not worthy of the name of religion. By its very definition religion is a particular way to the Supreme Goal. It is the search for the

eternal. So Vedanta says that whatever religion you may profess you will not have to change that course. But you should not think that your course is the only course, and all other courses are wrong. You follow your own course without quarrelling with others about the course. If you are sincere you will reach the Goal. One and the same God is being worshipped by the Christians in the churches, by the Jews in the synagogues, by the Mohammedans in the mosques, and by the Hindus in the temples. The main thing is knowing how to reach Him.

Until you reach Him, you are sure to be in the domain of suffering and darkness. There may be occasional glimpses of a little joy, but mainly it is a state of bondage because your knowledge is limited, and any limitation is bondage. This is the view that Vedanta has towards all other religions of the world.

Any follower of any religion can be a Vedantist if he accepts these basic principles: that the Supreme Goal can be reached not just in one way but in different ways if you are sincere, if you cultivate devotion to the Ideal and inner purity. Whatever external form of worship you may adopt, you cannot reach the Goal unless you fulfill these basic conditions. All the great spiritual leaders, if you analyze their teachings, want

you to fulfil these two conditions of spiritual life. Whatever you may do, if you do not fulfil these two conditions you are not on the spiritual path. Dogmas, doctrines and practices will not be adequate unless they help you to develop your inner purity and also your spiritual eagerness for devotion to God.

Vedanta is very comprehensive. It views life as a whole. Some people say that Vedanta is other-worldly and that their religion and philosophy is superior because it is this-worldly. What nonsense. They do not see that neither this-worldliness or other-worldliness is the right approach to life. A man lives on many levels; physical, intellectual, aesthetic, spiritual, moral. If you want to have a sound scheme of life you must take into account all aspects. You must have vision forward and backward, only then can you understand the present time. You must see things as a whole, which is one special feature of Vedanta.

Vedanta has taken into account all the life values and classified them under three main heads:

(1) Moral values (dharma). Vedanta considers moral values to be the fundamental values of life, not the economic values. Before a person is taught how to make money, he should be taught

to be truthful and honest. Otherwise, whatever you teach him, if you do not build character along with it, will be lost to himself and to society. So Vedanta considers moral values to be basic. You must have inner capacity, intellectual and moral capability, if you are to seek a career in this world. You must have the moral capacity to follow the path of virtue under all circumstances. Life should be started with this dharma, the inner resources, moral and intellectual.

(2) Wealth (artha). It is said that if you want to live in this world, you must have wealth. That is true. You seek wealth in any form, physical strength, external resources, possessions, friends, children, wife, home. Any kind of external resources a person can have.

(3) Pleasure (kama). He wants happiness and pleasures, as well. Very good, have sense pleasure, intellectual pleasures. But you should not deviate from moral principles. Keeping on that path of virtue seek as much wealth as you can, as much pleasure as you can, but, stand on that fundamental principle, the path of virtue.

Vedanta says that these three values do not cover the entire life. There must be spiritual values, because whatever you may find in this life, it does not satisfy your deepest longing for complete freedom. Eternal values only can give

you real joy, unmixed blessing. It is the spiritual search, spiritual development, that can satisfy that longing. If you do not take in to account that spiritual idealism, the scheme of life cannot be complete. You can develop your moral nature, aesthetic nature, intellectual nature, emotional nature, for all things that are desirable in this life, pleasures and possessions. Still, you cannot be quite happy, because this does not remove the root of the evil. The evil can be overpowered but cannot be eliminated through morality.

If you want to attain perfection, to be as perfect as the father in heaven is perfect, you must seek spirituality, you must seek God. The other values must be taken into account, but with reference to the Supreme Ideal. In this way Vedanta has taken into account all values of life.

A person starts life this way if he has a strong desire for life's enjoyments. Vedanta says that these desires have to be outgrown. A person has to outgrow these by following a graduation of ideals, a progressive course of training. Vedanta does not say that everybody should give up everything else, close the eyes and sit in meditation. That is not the teaching of Vedanta.

Vedanta says, it is a fact that you have insatiable, inveterate desires within you. You cannot quell them or uproot them. What is the way?

You have to outgrow these desires by a progressive course of training. By gradual self-discipline, you have to outgrow them. The first step to outgrow them is to follow the path of virtue during the search of pleasure. You cannot at once be quite established on the path of virtue, but while you are following the path of prosperity, keep to the path of virtue as much as you can. Gradually, you will be more and more established on the path of virtue.

Eventually, you will see this world cannot satisfy your longing for perfection, endless bliss. You will want something beyond this. That something is the Supreme Good. That is God. That spiritual sense to go beyond the duality of darkness and light of this world, the duality of happiness and misery of this world, that sense to go beyond both will not develop within you unless you follow the path of virtue. Unless you follow the path of virtue your life in this world is not secure. Unless you follow the path of virtue you will not be able to rise to the spiritual path. The practice of virtue must precede the cultivation of spirituality.

Vedanta has taken into account all experiences, the waking experience, the dream experience, the sleep experience, also the superconscious experience. In the search for truth Vedanta has

used the data of life experience. Usually philosophers build their philosophical conclusions from the waking experience. Occasionally, they refer to dream experience, or some psychologists may use the dream experience. But Vedanta has taken into consideration man's waking, dream, and sleep experience, and at the same time considers the superconscious experience.

One characteristic of Vedanta philosophy is that it starts with faith and ends in experience. Three things are necessary. You must, first of all, know what is the Supreme Reality through faith—by accepting verbal authority, conversation with a living teacher, or studying the scriptures. You have to start with these, otherwise, you cannot make head or tail of the Supreme Reality. Faith must be in the beginning of spiritual life. There is no other way. So it can start on faith. But faith can be grounded on reason. You want to be intellectually convinced of what Jesus Christ says, which is, "The Kingdom of heaven is within you."

If I look within myself, I find my heart is the devil's workshop. There is not the slightest trace of peace. What is the Kingdom of God? If you have any veneration for the Master, you will consider before you reject. If he says so, there must be some truth. But how is it possible? You cannot accept fully until your intellect assents.

However, you try to understand. There must be some truth which I do not thoroughly understand at this stage of my development, I will go on and exercise reasoning power, and ask questions.

Gradually, you will have intellectual comprehension of this truth, that the Kingdom of Heaven is within you. If you have a treasure within you, but you do not find it, it is of no use to you. If you have a million dollar treasure locked up in a box, and do not open the box to get it, it will be of no use to you. Similarly, you have to realize the Kingdom of Heaven within you. So first, faith. Vedanta says you should come to know from the scriptures, and from teachers, depending on verbal testimony.

Secondly, there should be reasoning. Try to understand, to be completely satisfied, intellectually convinced.

And then you must experience. Reason and experience must tally. Intellectually, you also assent to this truth that the Kingdom of Heaven is within you. Then by experience you know that it is truth. Vedanta has given a place for faith, reason, and mystical experience, as well as action and meditation. It is a very comprehensive system.

There are many details. Time and space do not permit going into the many details. Vedanta

is actually a foundation of all religions, but is seldom recognized as such. They are so buried under doctrine and dogma, they fail to recognize two truths, that human nature is essentially divine, and that there is one Supreme Being. No religion can deviate from these truths. But in Vedanta these two truths find the clearest expression, so much so that all doctine, dogmas, and practices that Vedanta suggests are based on these. Vedanta never loses sight of these two truths. These truths are more or less implicit in all religions, but they find the clearest expression in Vedanta.

Vedantic teachers have kept these truths in the forefront of the mind. This is why they have cosmic vision to see all religions as so many paths leading to the same goal. Vedanta is above all fanaticism and dogmatism, and intolerance. Vedanta is concerned more with spiritual awakening. Whatever spiritual course a person may follow, underlying all differences of doctrine and practice there are eternal spiritual principles. Whatever dogma, doctrine, we may follow according to our physical, intellectual, moral, and spiritual equipment, we should know that all this must conform to the fundamental principles. Our mind must be free from bigotry and fanaticism.

One of Vedanta's special features is its scope. Secondly, Vedanta accepts different aspects of the Supreme Reality. We have seen what the two fundamental teachings of Vedanta are. Vedanta accepts different aspects of the Supreme Being. According to Vedanta, the direct perception of Reality is the goal of life. Then the entire human life must be keyed to that Supreme Goal. Vedanta also suggests that there are different courses to reach the goal.

The courses differ and the spiritual aspirant can follow the course according to his or her development. Even in moral development, the principle of gradual growth is suggested. For instance, the highest spiritual truth is that taught by Jesus Christ, the principle of non-resistance. That means that good is returned for evil. But anyone and everyone cannot follow that principle. They have to rise gradually. A person who is a coward cannot be forgiving. His actions would just be a pretence. He has to rise to the level of justice first. He must first have the strength to do justice, quell the wicked. Then he can be forgiving.

One has to rise gradually in the spiritual path. Then Vedanta views all religions as the expression of one eternal religion, as so many paths or ways to reach the goal. In Vedanta

all values of life have been taken into account. A person is supposed to follow the path of outgrowing the sense desires, and gradually developing the spiritual sense and ultimately reaching the Supreme Goal.

CHAPTER 2

The Moral and Spiritual Foundations of Human Life

Modern man directs his attention to aspects of life other than moral and spiritual, and thereby reaps indifferent or unwanted results. The stable basis of human life, individual and collective, is not in economic sufficiency, technical efficiency, development of arts and industries, or cultural progress. The sound basis of human life is not even in political constitution, or in social organization, however sound it may be, because neither political constitution or social organization can function without the right types of human beings. The sound basis of human life is not even in philosophic knowledge, or scientific knowledge, because none of these ensures true human relationship, or ensures man's inner composure and wisdom.

True human relationships cannot exist unless there are fair dealings among men and

true fellow-feeling. Man can develop external resources in any form, as well as internal resources in the form of knowledge, scientific or philosophical, but he cannot utilize his resources unless he has balance and calmness of mind and clarity of vision. This is why Swami Vivekananda emphasizes more than anything else right types of human beings. No economic system, no external condition can help a man, truly speaking, unless he is sound morally and wise spiritually.

Moral life begins with due consideration for others. Just as you seek your own happiness, similarly, others seek their own happiness. In seeking and promoting your own happiness you should not jeopardize the happiness of others. Just as you try to avoid pain, you should try to avoid causing pain to others. Whether or not you can help others, you should, at least, avoid hurting others by word, thought, or deed. Any anti-feeling is a vice and will have a negative reaction on you. Anger, jealousy, hatred, pride, insincerity, or falsehood are all anti-feelings directed toward others, and they will hurt you much more than they hurt those to whom the vices are directed. If you become angry with a person and lose your temper, you are the first to be affected. You lose your clarity of vision, and your judgement becomes vitiated.

It is the consensus of all great teachers that man should overcome vices (any kind of anti-feeling towards others), and cultivate virtues. By virtues you can conquer vices. In this way you can be free from vices by persistent effort.

There are two aspects of moral life, to be good and to do good. Being good is the basis of doing good. People are so anxious to help others, but can they help themselves? This is the first question. You cannot do more good to others than you are good yourself, know that for certain. You may give instruction, but your life will deny your instruction. Nobody will follow you. However, he who is really good will always do good, because his mind is free of all anti-feelings. He has virtues, and the virtues will naturally find expression.

It is man's attachment to sense life that leads him astray. This attachment to sense life generally finds expression as attachment to pleasure and possessions. It leads to lust and greed, the most concentrated forms of sense attachment. The person who is attached to any sense object is almost certain to be emotionally involved.

If a person is attached to wealth, naturally he is likely to develop greed, fear for the preservation of wealth, and pride in the wealth. He will be jealous of those who have more, and will

have contempt for those who have less. A single attachment to any object will lead to all these emotional involvements. To get rid of vices one has to know how to overcome sense attachment.

We can get rid of sense attachment by directing the mind from lower values to higher values. Sense pleasures do not mean much, they tire your body and they tire your mind. After a long experience of pleasure there is a reaction, so you should seek higher values. A scientist or a philosopher who develops interest in the cultivation of knowledge will find much more joy in following the problems he is concerned with rather than in enjoying a hearty meal.

The only secret is this—that you direct your attention from the lower to the higher values, and from the lower to the higher ideals enriching your mind with noble thoughts by associating with noble people.

A person who is interested in the moral life follows these teachings, yet he cannot always depend on his own reasoning. Our emotions develop much earlier than our reasoning power. A child becomes emotionally drawn to anything that is pleasant, before he can distinguish between the pleasant and the good. One tragic element in this human life is that the pleasant and the good

are not identical. A child tastes some delicious food, a piece of cake, and will gulp it down without further consideration. But anything that is pleasant is not inevitably beneficial. It takes time to develop this power of judgement.

For this reason there has been prevalent in all societies teachers, scriptures, government laws, and social rules and regulations. If human minds could take care of themselves from the beginning, there would have been no need of this. If they understood the harmfulness of vices, and the benefit of virtues they would turn their minds to virtues. But it is not so. In the beginning of life you cannot depend on your judgment. You must distinguish between the pleasant and the good. Anything attractive is not necessarily good. You need to exercise the power of judgment, but that power is largely lacking early in life.

We have to consult with responsible senior persons and guide ourselves accordingly. A person who allows himself to be guided by superiors finds his mind gradually becoming purified. He overcomes vices to a large extent and gradually understand the value of virtues.

Virtues are values in themselves. Nothing else ensures self-composure and clarity of vision. Man can have external resources in any form, but he cannot utilize the resources without true

understanding. Some persons squander their resources in gambling, drinking, and debauchery. Any power, or glory, or position will not help you unless you have the power to rightly utilize all your resources.

More important is the development of your inner life. The Hindu scriptures declare that before you develop the power of making money, you must know the secret of right living. The first secret of right living is that you should not allow yourself to succumb to vices, but rather try to cultivate virtues, dharma. Dharma means moral life, moral law, and that is the first thing necessary to build character, to distinguish between right and wrong, and to follow the path of righteousness.

What is the good of this dharma? It makes your secular life sound, and also leads to spiritual life. One of the great Hindu teachers says, "That is moral law which leads to spiritual perfection, leads to liberation and the attainment of the Supreme Good, and which also at the same time ensures well being in this very life."

Every human seeks secular well-being whether or not he cares for spiritual life. He wants to live in favourable conditions, he wants good shelter, good food, good companions. What ensures these things? Dharma, moral law ensures

inner understanding, inner strength, and at the same time creates a favourable situation for you with your fellow-beings. This is why one great Hindu Codifier of social and religious laws, Manu, who codified the Vedic rules of conduct, has mentioned in his institute of laws that there is one universal duty of all human beings, and that is to cultivate virtues such as truthfulness, kindness and forgiveness, and to control vices. This is the one universal duty of all human beings. If you say, "I don't care for God," I don't mind. If you say, "I am an atheist," well and good. Whatever you may be in this world, whatever belief you may have, whatever position you may have—you may be a king, or a farmer, or a lawyer, or a doctor, whatever duty you may have —you should not transgress the moral laws. This has been strongly emphasized by Manu. Duties differ according to a person's situation in life, but this is one duty for all human beings. In whatever form you want secular well-being you have to cultivate dharma, not to speak of spiritual welfare.

Man lives on different levels. To understand this we have to understand what man really is. Apparently, man is a psychophysical being. He has a physical body and a mind. Apparently, he is the aggregate of the body, the mind, the five

organs of perception, and the five motor organs. This much we understand, but this is not the real man. The real man is distinct from the psycho-physical constitution. The real man is the knower of the body. Just as he is the knower of this chair, the knower of this light, he is a knower of the body. He is a knower of internal facts, he knows whether he is happy or unhappy, whether he has love or hatred towards anybody. This cannot be measured by the external behavior. There is no measurement of these internal facts with regard to happiness or love but through inner perception. If I ask you, "Do you love your wife?" You answer, "Oh, yes, I love her very much." "How do you know?" "Oh, I embrace her, kiss her and speak sweet words to her, and give her presents."

You can do all those things without having a jot of love within you. Similarly, a woman can also show all the expressions of love, but what is the real test of love, of the mental states? Inner experience. Many may not recognize it, but of objective proof there is none.

There is "something" that knows the states of the mind, a cognizer of the mind. Just as the cognizer of the external facts is distinct from the external objects; just as the cognizer of the bodily conditions is distinct from the body and its

conditions, similarly, the cognizer of the mind and its conditions is distinct from the mind and its states.

There is one cognizer of all. I see a chair; I understand that I am not so well today; I don't feel so happy today. One cognizer of the external facts; one cognizer of the bodily conditions; one cognizer of the soundness of the organs; one cognizer of the mental states. That which cognizes objects external and internal is distinct from all objects. The cognizer is invariable in the midst of the variable. External objects change. You may have seen a light here yesterday, but today you don't see the light. It is gone. Who correlates the succeeding event with the preceding event? It is that one constant factor, the cognizer, that maintains our identity in spite of all the changing conditions of the body, the organs, and the mind. That is the real man, and that asserts itself as "I"; I know this, I know that, I hear this, I like this, I do not like this; yesterday I saw a man here, today I do not see him. Who experiences all this? One experiencer correlating the various facts, comparing them. That experiencer is changeless and that changeless Self, distinct from all the other facts of the human personality, is the real person, the invariable in the midst of all that are variable. That you are!

How do you know you are that! Further proof is this. Here is a light, apparently self-luminous, but in spite of its luminosity it is not aware of its own existence, nor is it aware of the existence of anything else. But you, are you aware of your existence? You say, "Yes, I am. I exist." You are also aware of that existence which comes into the range of your perception; you are aware of the existence of others. This is the fundamental difference between the cognizer and this light. This light is apparently self-effulgent, but you are a self-luminous being, aware of itself, without any proof.

The cognizer is self-evident, and because it exists, it can think, not the other way around. "I think, therefore I am," Descartes said. Not so. I exist, so I can think, I can see, I can hear, I can imagine. This Self is self-existant, self-luminous, and constant, so man is essentially immortal pure spirit, free. However this immortal spirit gets more or less identified with this psychophysical constitution. Being identified with this changing psychophysical constitution, a complex whole, so he lives on various levels of life, high and low; the physical level, the aesthetic level, the moral level, the spiritual level.

Hindu teachers have pointed out that of all these levels of life, the highest is the spiritual

level, because the spiritual level means the realization of the nature of the Self. You realize yourself as immortal, pure, free. Next to the spiritual life is the moral life, which is the access to the spiritual life. Without inner purification you cannot have the awareness of the true nature of the Self. You may hear about the true nature of the self again and again, still, you will not develop the understanding, far less the conviction, without first having inner purification.

Man does not realize himself as a spiritual entity, but rather recognizes himself as a psychophysical being, a complex whole. In this way, the very Self which is pure, being associated with this adjunct, functions as the ego. "I am.". A person uses the expression, "I am," with regard to the body, with regard to the different aspects of the psychophysical constitution. "I am a great philosopher," "I am happy," "I am wealthy," he identifies the Self with the ego which asserts itself in different ways. It is this ego that makes man selfish, because he recognizes himself as distinct from others. My happiness is separate, my interest is separate. This causes his selfishness. As long as man does not have a true idea of the Self, as long as he is centered in the ego, he cannot overcome self-interest in the true sense.

What can he do? Even with this ego, he can cultivate virtues and overcome vices. He can distinguish what is good, what is evil, what is right and what is wrong, and, thereby, keep away from the path of vice and follow the path of virtue. He understands that it is to his own best interest. All our interests are woven into the interests of our fellow-beings. This much he understands because he has already followed the moral course, even without developing reasoning power. He develops some understanding and gradually, on his own initiative, he overcomes vices and follows the path of virtue. We have already seen that it is the moral life that sustains our physical life. If you want to maintain good health, you cannot eat or live recklessly. You have to live with great moderation and self-control, and that means moral practice. You cannot develop your intellectual power without moral practice. It is the consensus of the Vedic teachers that virtue brightens intellect. Emotions hurt you, rob you of your good sense, blur your vision, vitiate your judgement. Unless you control your emotions, you cannot have right understanding. How can you have intellectual power? You may be a clever animal at best. The great philosopher of Greece, Socrates said, "Virtue is wisdom." Unless you have virtue you cannot have wisdom.

A person who follows the path of virtue has real understanding, develops wisdom, and maintains balance of mind. His aesthetic life is also safe, because the sensuous life has a tendency to gravitate towards the sensual life without this balance of mind. All these different aspects of life are sustained by the moral life. Anyone who practices virtue naturally gets the best out of this life.

What happens then? He can evaluate this life, truly speaking. This life has limitations. You cannot have unalloyed joy here, unmixed blessing, even though you desire them. You think that if you have enough wealth all your problems will be solved, but wealth itself will be a problem. Or you think that if you have beauty all your problems will be solved, but beauty itself will be a problem. There is no life, however high it may be, that is free from problems. A person, after enjoying prosperity, after enjoying fame and power and glory, recognizes the inherent limitation of any search for the temporal.

Broadly speaking, secular life means the search for the temporal. We are constantly seeking security in the insecure. We are finding someone to love, and set our heart on something which is not the final object of love. We love our wealth, our friends, our family, our children, constantly

searching for someone to love. That is the human life, the quest of someone or something to love.

We find that everything frustrates us, ultimately. A person having good experiences in this life recognizes the limitations of evil as well. We are trying to overcome evil by good. When we attain good by the practice of virtues, we become convinced of the limitation of good also. Then we turn from this duality of good and evil, happiness and unhappiness, prosperity and adversity, sickness and health, and seek something beyond. From the relative good we turn to the absolute Good; from the temporal we turn to the Eternal. This is the beginning of the spiritual life.

We may turn to God, but if it is for the sake of more power and beauty, or to get out of some calamity, it is not the real seeking of God. The real search for God begins when our mind is purified to such an extent that we are convinced of the inherent limitation not only of evil but also of good, and we turn from the highest good to God. Yet, we can live in this world free from worldliness, if we look upon everything as a means to the Supreme End. Our wealth, our beauty, our power, our prestige are not ends in themselves; all these things are meant to direct

us to the Highest, to the absolute Good. Only God is good in the absolute sense.

We understand this and try to develop our devotion to Him. At the same time, a person who has this understanding develops faith, because he knows that his longing for the eternal can be satisfied only by attaining to that Supreme One, the Eternal One. He develops faith in God, and also the understanding of the nature of God. He recognizes that God is not some extra-cosmic being but rather that He is the basis and being of this universe. He is the innermost Reality, the one Self of all. When a person recognizes God as such, he understands He is immanent and transcendent. He is in everything; still, He is beyond everything, because He is the pure Light of Consciousness. That pure Light of Consciousness is also pure Bliss, Perfection itself. And that Supreme Being, the innermost Reality, holding everything, the source of all power and beauty and greatness and glory, is innermost in each one of us. The Self of the universe is the Self within everyone of us. The Kingdom of God is within you. You recognize that you are not just a physical or psychophysical being, you are, truly speaking, a spiritual entity. You recognize your deepest relationship with the Supreme Being.

You do not hold to the ego anymore. You live with the ego, but you know you are beyond this ego. When a person develops this sense, he goes beyond the ego. As long as he holds to the ego very firmly, he cannot, truly speaking, develop unselfishness. He can develop enlightened self-interest. He understands that it is in his best interest to practise virtue. He can keep physically well, and intellectually great. He can have a good relationship with others, which is conducive to individual good as well as the collective good; but he is holding all the while to the ego.

Enlightened self-interest is not the selflessness which religion teaches ultimately. Unenlightened self-interest is very crude. It hurts you and hurts your neighbour, while enlightened self-interest helps you and your neighbour. But it is not the goal.

When you develop an understanding of the true nature of the Self, you find that the ego is only the apparent self. Behind the apparent self is the real Self, immortal, free. When you try to hold to this real Self, then selflessness begins in the true sense.

What happens then? Your view of your fellow-beings changes. You know that each human being is not just an ordinary mortal.

In each and every one there is the immortal spirit. You find your inner relationship with God, and as you progress in spiritual life, you find your inner relationship with others. With the development of spiritual consciousness this moral life becomes quite secure. If you do not develop spiritual consciousness, and hold to the ego, your moral life cannot be secure. You can have enlightened self-interest, but that interest will always conflict with other interests, because it is always bound up with your interests and this ego.

Enlightened self-interest cannot be the ultimate goal of ethical life. Ethical life really begins with the development of the consciousness of the spiritual Self. With the development of the consciousness of your relationship with the Supreme Self, with the development of the consciousness of your relationship with human beings, your self expands and embraces all, automatically. There is an intrinsic relation between the spiritual life and the ethical life. Just as spiritual life develops with the awareness of the true nature of the Self, similarly, ethical life also needs the development of the true nature of the Self, otherwise, you cannot identify yourself with others. Why should you "Love thy neighbour as thyself". Because your neighbour is your Self.

Your self is not just within this psychophysical constitution, your Self dwells in all beings. Just as spiritual life means the attunement of the individual self to the Supreme Self, somehow or other you relate yourself to God... whether you think of Him as the Master, Father, Mother, or Beloved, the closer the relationship, the more advanced you are spiritually. Ethical life means the attunement of this individual self to the spiritual Self.

The more you attune yourself to the Supreme Self, the more you can find unison with others. This is the culmination of spiritual life, which is promoted by the ethical life. It is through the ethical life that you enter and find access to the spiritual life. When you find some access to the spiritual life, your ethical life becomes solid. Steadily, you move toward the spiritual life in your effort to realize God. Teachers declare that it is the moral law which promotes our well-being in any aspect of secular life. It is the moral life that forms the sound basis of human life, and this moral life is supported by spiritual principles. The sound basis of human life is both.

Chapter 3
The Spiritual Teacher

Just as we need a teacher of a secular subject, similarly, we need a teacher of religion. There are countless books on almost all the subjects you want to know, yet the books cannot give us adequate help; we cannot do without teachers. If books could supply us with all the knowledge that we need, the universities could be replaced by libraries. Our learned professors could retire and live in seclusion and make themselves more distinguished by writing books.

The reason why books alone cannot give us adequate help seems to be that each author treats a subject in his own way. Many things remain unsaid and unexplained. Then, the reader has limited understanding and capacity, as well as a limited stock of knowledge, so that at every step he finds some difficulty.

Questions arise in the mind, and we always feel in reading a book, that in order to grasp what the author has said, we must know more than what has been stated in the book. That is why a

teacher is needed for the cultivation of knowledge. The necessity is greater in the field of religion, because religion deals particularly with supersensuous realities, realities which the senses fail to perceive. Which even thoughts cannot comprehend—thoughts such as God, infinite, eternal, the origin of the universe, the soul, the real Self of man, and life beyond death.

In religion there is a special need of teachers. Actually, there are teachers of religion in many universities. There are teachers of comparative religion, history of religion, and philosophy of religion, as well as innumerable ministers in the churches and temples. You are receiving help from teachers and books, but you are gaining only indirect knowledge of reality. You do not perceive God (direct knowledge) by merely reading or hearing about God. Just as there is direct and indirect knowledge of the different things of this world, similarly, there can be direct and indirect knowledge of God. The great mystics of the world declare that they have seen God more intensely than we see these sensible objects. Even the revealed texts do not reveal God to us. They give us indirect knowledge of God. It is like knowing something about a country by reading travellers' accounts, by reading other books, by looking at a map, by studying pictures.

Similarly, the help we receive from religious books, from scriptures, from lectures on religion, and from sermons, leave us in the dark because they do not solve life's problems permanently.

There is a need of the direct knowledge of God. When you have the direct perception of reality, then only, your ignorance is completely dispelled. All your bondage and suffering is removed forever. You enter into eternal life, into the light that never fails, into the peace that can really be said to be abiding.

It is absolutely necessary for the permanent solution of our problems that we should have direct perception of the Ultimate Reality. We must reach the Ideal Existence, otherwise, how can our deepest longing for the eternal be satisfied? We must reach that one source of all beauty, of all knowledge, of all life, of all love. We must reach that source because this world, evidently, does not answer to our conception of perfection, however much we may struggle. In spite of all our great achievements the world refuses to be an ideal place for us.

How can that deep longing within the heart of human beings, that longing for eternal life, for absolute peace, be satisfied? It can only be satisfied by reaching that Supreme Reality, which is immanent in the universe. We do not perceive

that simply because of darkness, ignorance. But through the cultivation of direct knowledge that ignorance is dispelled.

For the cultivation of direct knowledge, special teachers are needed. Just as a person can specialize in the various secular subjects, so a person can, also, specialize in religion. When there is a sincere search for such a teacher, the teacher is always to be found. The problem is that, generally, there is not much of a search for such a teacher. People are mostly satisfied with what they have. They enter into religious life not for the sake of God, but for the sake of the world. They worship God, they pray to God, they even meditate on God for the things of the world. They study religion, mainly, for the satisfaction of intellectual curiosity. As long as this position prevails, they are not seekers of the direct perception of God, and they cannot have much success in finding a true teacher.

Most of the religious books are written by persons who are not deeply interested in religious life. They study religion objectively, just as one may study any subject. One may be interested in music, one may be interested in gardening, so, one may be interested in religion just for the satisfaction of the curiosity. Many books have been written in this manner,

and this is why sufficient help for the spiritual aspirant is not forthcoming from these types of books.

The difference between an ordinary religious person and a spiritual aspirant is this: the spiritual aspirant is a seeker of spiritual reality, the ideal existence, while a religious person deals in religion, he does not dive deep into the heart of religion in an attempt to reach the bed-rock of reality.

When a person actually turns to the spiritual reality, when he longs to reach that ideal existence gathered from his experiences in the world, then he will ask: "Am I to give up the search for that ideal reality, that deep longing within me, forever, and try to accept this world, and accept death as the final end?" And when he can answer: "No, in this world of dualities I cannot find the supreme goal I want to reach. I must solve the problem," then, and only then, he becomes convinced of the inherent limitations of this relative existence, and seeks God as an ideal, for the sake of God. It is then that he wants a teacher of the type who can help him in removing all ignorance. This teacher will be not only well-versed in the scriptures, but will have some perception of the Supreme Reality. He should be capable of explaining the texts in terms of

reason, and who is sinless and not infected by worldly desires.

Once such a teacher has been found, the spiritual aspirant should go to him with reverence, with humility, and with sincerity. Open the mind to the teacher and lay bare your inner difficulties. One should also approach with the spirit of service, because reverence, humility, and the attitude of service, make the mind receptive of spiritual knowledge. Only thus will he establish a very deep intimate relationship with the teacher. It is only through that relationship that spirituality can be transmitted. If the relationship is only of money and the like, spirituality cannot flow through that medium. We need inspiration, also, not just information.

We know many things about religion and the ethical life, but still, ethical principles do not become the guiding forces in our lives, because they do not inspire us. Moral and spiritual life depend less on information than on inspiration. We can talk about God and moral principles, but we lack in devotion because we do not have inspiration. That inspiration has to be received from the teacher; books cannot give that inspiration.

The devotion the book treats of, does it exist in the book? The knowledge the scriptures speak

of, does it exist in the book? If the book is squeezed, not a drop of devotion or knowledge will come from it. As Sri Ramakrishna said, "It is written in the almanac forecast that there will be several inches of rainfall, but if we squeeze the almanac, we do not get a drop of rain." Similarly, you can know all about the spiritual principles, all about God and soul, devotion and knowledge from the scriptures, still, if we squeeze the scriptures, not a drop of spiritual devotion or spiritual knowledge can be found to come from them. These things do not exist in the written word, in books, etc., these things dwell only in the hearts of true spiritual personalities. You have to go to them.

For instance, you can read a treatise on milk and you know all about milk, the various constituents of milk, but still, you cannot know milk in the true sense. In order to know what milk is, you have to secure the milk, and then drink it. Only then can you get the full benefit of milk. Similarly, with spiritual ideals, they may be within you, but the ideals will not implant themselves in your mind as ideals unless you see them demonstrated in the lives of true teachers. You have to go to a teacher to see that these principles are actually lived and demonstrated. When you find such a teacher and see these

spiritual principles actually demonstrated in his life, your mind is filled with inspiration and real faith in the supersensuous realities. When you receive the instruction from the teacher, you will have the strength to follow it. This is why the teacher is necessary in the spiritual life. When a person finds such a teacher, the relationship becomes special and life-long. When your heart craves for God, when you accept God as the Supreme Goal, you want some course which you can follow for life.

At this point, you are beyond the stage of experimentation, that stage which says: "Let me try this path, let me try that path." There you have not developed true longing for the ideal, and cannot seek the true teacher. You can go to many teachers, one after another, for the satisfaction of your intellectual curiosity. But, when you seek God as an ideal, when you long to find some way to reach that goal, you have to be satisfied with one teacher, otherwise, you will remain in the stage of experimentation, and true progress in the spiritual life cannot begin.

When you have become quite assured, and have come to the decision, "Yes, this is my goal (seeking God as an ideal), and this is the way I shall follow until I reach the goal as taught by the spiritual teacher", then only your progress

in the spiritual life can really begin. This guru-disciple relationship must be life-long. Most people in the West do not realize the importance of having a particular spiritual teacher, because that part of religion has not been emphasized. Vedanta, more than any other religion, emphasizes that through devotion or through knowledge, illumined by the teacher, you can proceed and ultimately realize God as the Soul of your soul. You will be one with Him, that is the goal of every life—not merely to be satisfied with just an acceptance of some kind of faith, or certain dogmas, ceremonies, and rites. In Vedantic culture there is a place for each of these religious disciplines. Prayer or scriptural studies, practice of charity or austerities or any other kind of worship, all have a place, but are not considered to be the ultimate end of religious life. The ultimate end is the realization of God as the very Soul of souls. In Hinduism, great importance has been attached to the practice of meditation. When the mind becomes quite serene and transparent, that Supreme Reality is actually perceived.

Each person has to follow a particular course, steadily; without systematic practice there cannot be systematic growth of life. The course must be in conformity with one's psychophysical

system. Only a teacher, a true spiritual teacher, can find the actual path that will suit a particular individual. The teacher will explain to you the goal, will put you on the path, but you will have to walk along the path. The teacher will not carry you on his shoulders to the goal.

In following the path, you will receive guidance, inspiration and protection; but you have to work to follow the course. If you don't follow the course, you will be like the person who doesn't follow the doctor's prescription and doesn't take the prescribed medicine. How can he expect to be cured? One should be determined to follow the course laid out by the teacher.

The teacher will play the teacher's part. He will be very gracious, very compassionate, ready to help you in every possible way; but you will have to follow the course. The teacher will try to give you as much protection, guidance, and inspiration as it is possible to give.

One of the Upanishads gives a hint of the help a student receives from the teacher in the following story: A person is kidnapped and blindfolded very tightly. He is taken to a strange place, and left in a wilderness after being robbed of all his possessions. He senses that his captors have left him and he begins to roam about, shouting

and crying. His hands are tied, and he can't remove the blindfold. After a long time another person comes and, seeing the man's predicament, removes the bandage from his eyes and the bonds from his hands. "Where do you come from?" He asks. "I come from such-and-such a place." "Oh, yes, I know that village," says the rescuer. "You have to go west to find your home village." Seeing that the kidnapped man is puzzled and still confused about where he should go to reach his home, the stranger takes him by the hand and leads him to the road which will take him home. The kidnapped victim thanks his benefactor and soon finds his way back home.

A person in the grip of ignorance, not knowing where to go, is helpless; but with the help of a true teacher, he succeeds in reaching the goal. The Upanishads say that receiving the guidance of a competent and gracious teacher is something very rare. The difficulties in life are so great that many do not have the opportunity to listen to talks about these truths. Even if they get the opportunity many do not avail themselves of the opportunity. Life is so crowded with futilities, so overcrowded with vanities, that many think it is a waste of time and energy to listen to this kind of talk. Many who do listen, do not comprehend the truths, and of those who do comprehend,

many do not accept the truths as the ideal of life, nor seek God for the sake of God, or Truth for the sake of Truth.

Rare are the individuals who seek the Truth. Blessed is the seeker, and blessed, also, is the teacher who leads the disciple to the Goal. These three things are rare—the human life; the desire for Truth (freedom from bondage); the guidance of a gracious and competent teacher.

Even the pursuit of mediate knowledge becomes effective only when you receive it through a teacher. You can read books, but until you receive adequate help from a teacher your knowledge will not be very strong or effective (even in regard to ordinary knowledge). We find in the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad, a sage, Yajnavalkya, who was very well versed in scriptural lore, going to King Janaka. The king was a patron of learning and many sages came to him and discussed spiritual problems with him.

Sometimes, a teacher kept as many as a thousand students who were provided with free board and lodging. There was no fee charged for any of the students. That was the custom in ancient India. The king, generally, would provide the sages with enough money to cover expenses.

When Yajnavalkya came, the king asked, "For what purpose have you come here? With a

desire for cattle, or to hear some subtle questions asked?"

"For both," Yajnavalkya answered.

"Well, let us continue this spiritual discussion," the king said.

Then, Yajnavalkya said to King Janaka, "You have met many teachers in your life and you have read many books, but I want to know, especially, what you have learned from your teacher."

The king said, "I have met these teachers. From this teacher I have learned this," and he narrated what he had learned from that particular teacher.

Yajnavalkya continued, "Please let me know what you have learned from this other teacher." Then the king narrated what he had learned from that teacher. In this way, Yajnavalkya asked the king what he knew from six different teachers.

The discussion continued because he was laying emphasis not just on what he had received from books, but on what he had actually received from the teachers. Many things remained unsaid, many things remained unexplained in books. This is why a particular teacher is necessary, not for this mediate knowledge, because as long as you seek mediate knowledge, indirect knowledge, you can go to as many teachers as you need. But when

you seek the direct knowledge of God, when God becomes the Supreme Goal of life, then you have to stick to a particular course. In order to find a particular way, you need a particular teacher. As long as you follow that course, you must be true to that particular teacher.

What does that mean—to be true to a particular teacher? It means that you establish a relationship with that particular teacher. Through reverence, through humility, and through service you keep up that relationship. Service is essential because that disciplines the mind, that chastens the mind, and straightens many twists and turns of the mind. Many angularities of the mind are smoothed through service, and there is brought about a true harmony between the two personalities.

If you have any kind of fear or doubt about the teacher, you have fear and doubt about the spiritual course also. In this case, following the spiritual path will not be very firm. That is why the relationship between the teacher and the spiritual aspirant has been recommended in Vedantic literature. In the present day, we do not emphasize the spirit of devotion and reverence to the teacher and without emphasizing reverence and devotion we cannot get inspiration; and without inspiration, moral and spiritual, life cannot grow.

Your intellectual life may grow, and you may be great intellectually, still, you will not be a spiritual personality, and the problems of life will not be solved.

The basis of this physical life, the intellectual life, and our entire material well-being, is in the moral life. If that life is shaky you will make many mistakes because you will not be able to develop proper insight. You will misuse your intellectual power, as we see being done on an international scale. You will misuse your wealth because of lack of moral principles.

It is through the moral life that the purity of the soul finds expression on the intellectual and the physical planes. It is very essential, therefore, that one finds a teacher, establish a relationship, and follow the course suggested.

For the cultivation of spiritual life particularly, three things are necessary, just as three things are necessary for physical development. The three things, or conditions, that are necessary for physical development are: one, you must live in a congenial atmosphere. Your human situation and your natural surroundings should be helpful as much as possible. Two, you should take wholesome food regularly, and, three, you should follow some kind of physical exercises for the cultivation of your physical health.

Similarly, in the spiritual life, one should live in a congenial atmosphere, and associate with spiritual personalities as far as possible. Second, one should also enrich the mind with spiritual thoughts, and wholesome ideas. Third, one should continue certain practical courses prescribed by the teacher. If a person can hold to these three things in spiritual life, his or her progress is assured, and sooner or later, he or she will reach the goal, there is no doubt about it.

Chapter 4

The Purpose and Practice of Meditation

Meditation is the deep concentration of the mind on a chosen subject. Just as the rays of a searchlight can be focused on a single point, similarly, the scattered thoughts dwelling in the mind can be gathered up and focused on a particular subject, or even on a particular point. The practice of meditation is not peculiar to religion. Concentration of mind is the key to every kind of knowledge. The more intense the concentration, the deeper is the knowledge. A scientist has to concentrate his thoughts on the facts he observes. A philosopher has to concentrate his thoughts on the metaphysical truths upon which he speculates.

Concentration is very natural. It does not always require persistent practice. An angler, while fishing, easily concentrates his thoughts on the float. A marksman shooting at a target easily concentrates his thoughts on the target. Thus

concentration is the key to all kinds of achievements. An actor has to concentrate his thoughts on the part he plays if he intends to play skilfully. A housewife cannot cook a hearty meal unless she concentrates her thoughts on the cooking.

Concentration of the mind is very difficult to attain, because natural concentration is normally not at your command. On certain occasions, how-ever, your mind becomes automatically concentrated. If you are really interested in something, your mind becomes absorbed in the thought of that something. Through deep hate or through intense love your mind can be concentrated on the object of hate or love. If you see something very striking, you may become awestruck, dumbfounded. For the moment your mind becomes fully concentrated.

But the difficulty is this. Such concentration of the mind is not at your command. Your mind at its own sweet will becomes stuck on a certain subject, and you cannot remove it as you want. Naturally, very often ramblings, reveries, and vagaries prevail in the mind. My teacher (Swami Brahmananda) used to say that if a person loses a little money he is very regretful, but he does not calculate how much of the mind he fritters away through ramblings.

It is essential to control the mind and make it free from all reveries and ramblings, to be able to concentrate, and to pull off from a subject at will. These two factors go together: attachment and detachment. Through the practice of concentration, you can bring both these powers under your command. That is the purpose of the practice of concentration, to make your mind free from distraction which robs the peace of mind. To maintain poise and peace of mind, one should practise concentration.

Concentration of the mind can be practised on any object, external or internal. If you really love something which is ennobling, elevating, or uplifting, meditate on that for some time every day. Visualize that, and fix your mind on it. This has to be done regularly, every day, even though it may be done for only ten minutes. You will be able to overcome the distraction of the mind to a great extent, and develop the power of concentration.

There are many ways of practising concentration, and you can practise on anything that is uplifting. Concentrate on the form and meaning, as well. A flower, the sun, even beautiful scenery, or the character of a great personality may be utilized. If you have been inspired by the patriotism of anyone, you can think about the

inner character of that person. You will feel uplifted. Anything that is elevating, external or internal, you can adopt for the practice of concentration. But at the moment we are particularly interested in concentration (meditation) as a spiritual discipline; and as a spiritual discipline, the supreme purpose of meditation is to realize God.

A person can meditate on God and worship God through a form. The followers of Jesus Christ may meditate on him through the form of Jesus. That form is the very embodiment of divine love, divine purity, divine wisdom, divine joy, divine freedom. A follower of Sri Krishna may take up the form of Sri Krishna in the same sense. These are personal forms representing the Divinity. Out of His grace, God may reveal himself to a person in that form. We know from the pronouncements of the great seers that they actually saw God through form, the very form through which they used to meditate on Him and worship Him. However, this kind of God vision is not considered to be God-consciousness in the highest sense. If God appears to you in a form, he may also disappear from you, and you may not be able to repeat this experience any more.

There is an experience of God as the innermost reality. He is the innermost of each and every thing in the universe, therefore, He is the

innermost of every soul. At the back of every soul is the Supreme consciousness. When a person realizes God as the innermost self, and finds himself in God, and God in everything, and everything in God, he will never lose consciousness of God. God will be ever revealed unto him. Sri Krishna says in the Bhagavad-gita, "Once you see Him as the fundamental reality underlying every phase of existence, and once you realize your essential unity with the Divinity, you can never lose sight of Him. Seeing the many, you see the one. In seeing the One, you see the many."

Through deep concentration of the mind you can reach a state of mystical experience where you see God and God alone. You realize yourself as belonging to Him, and you realize the essential purpose of meditation is this kind of God-realization.

A person who realizes God, realizes himself as belonging to Him. God is the reality, so you cannot see God apart from anything. Through deepest concentration of the mind on this very Self, one can realize God. Or through the deepest concentration of the mind on the all-pervading Supreme Self one can realize himself in God. In realizing God you find yourself as belonging to Him. This idea has been very well expressed by the great mystic saint, Meister Eckhart

("Meister Eckhart," translated by C de B Evans, Vol.I, London, John M. Watkins, 1956, p.173):

> "Any soul that sees God must have forgotten herself and have lost her own self; while she sees and remembers herself she nor sees nor is conscious of God. But when for God's sake she loses herself and abandons all things then in God does she refind herself, for knowing God she is knowing herself and all things in God, in perfection."
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> "She (the soul) is one with God and not united: Where God is, there is the soul and where the soul is, there is God." (Ibid Vol.II p.89)

Then in one of his prayers, Meister Eckhart says (Ibid Vol.II p.143):

> "O Eternal Light of Divine Glory, since thou art in my innermost depths, since thou transcendest all things, be to me *That thou art*, a turning away from all things into the ineffable Good that thou art in thy naked self."

If a person wants to realize God in this sense, his mind must turn to God. That is the essential condition for the practise of meditation. Many are very anxious to practise meditation these days. Meditation on what? You can practise meditation on anything, but if you want to attain the supreme purpose, the highest purpose of meditation, the realization of God, then you will have to fulfil certain conditions.

The first condition is that your mind must turn away from the search for the temporal to the search for the eternal. Secondly, you should feel a deep longing for realization of the eternal. The result of this realization is that you enter into life eternal. You attain complete freedom, you are initiated into the intrinsic freedom, purity, and blissfulness of the self. If your object is to attain immortality, to attain freedom from all sufferings and bondages, to be established in complete freedom, then come and practise meditation on God.

If we observe human life, we find it is a two-fold way. A vast majority of human beings are running after the temporal, seeking wealth, pleasure, political power, social standing, some kind of secular knowledge, fame, glory, or whatever else. None of these desires can be considered as eternal, but there are a few spiritual aspirants who understand the futility of the search for the temporal, and they turn to God. Such persons will be successful in practising meditation in the true sense.

If you are a seeker of temporal values, there are hundreds who are practising meditation for this very reason. Come and gain what you want. If you want to gain the highest result of meditation, such as immortality, such as the light that

never fails, the joy that has no limit, then you have to seek God as the ideal, the goal. This is one condition that one has to fulfil. This may seem to be an impossible condition, but it is not. You have to get ready for it, that is the main thing. People are so anxious to practise meditation, but they are not anxious to go through the preliminary courses. That is the trouble, but your mind can be easily turned from the temporal to the eternal. The following is the way.

According to Vedanta, there is no inherent contradiction between the search for the temporal and the search for the eternal. The search for the temporal can lead to the search for the eternal, if well regulated. That regulation is very simple. Are you interested in gaining wealth and all varieties of sense pleasures? You are welcomed to it. Seek it. But do not deviate from the moral path. This the only condition Vedanta will impose. It is not really an imposition for it is in your own best interest. You may gain wealth, power, position, even scientific or philosophical knowledge, but you cannot derive benefit from any of these external or internal resources unless you are firm in the moral life. Your material well-being has its secure basis only in the moral foundation. Remember that fact very well! Even

physical wealth you cannot maintain very well until you live with moderation and self-restraint. Your intellect will not develop into insight, or right understanding, unless you follow the path of virtue. Virtue brightens intellect. Otherwise, a person with all his intelligence is only a clever animal. If you want real understanding and insight along with your intelligence, you must be firm on the path of virtue.

How do you practise virtue? The practise is two-fold. On the one hand, you should make yourself free from all undesirable emotions and animosities such as hatred, jealousy, and pride directed toward your fellow beings. On the other hand, you should, at the same time cultivate truthfulness, sincerity, humility and other positive virtues like charity.

Your moral life supports your physical, intellectual and aesthetic life. Without the support of virtue you cannot develop noble sentiments and high imagination. Without high imagination, very noble feelings, if you take up aesthetics, your sensuousness will degenerate into sensuality.

If a person keeps firm on the path of virtue, he can utilize all his resources for his own benefit. He can gain wealth by unfair means very well, but whether he can use his wealth to

benefit himself for any length of time is highly questionable.

A scientist can gain scientific knowledge by trick, or without holding to moral courses, but he will not be able to utilize that knowledge for his own good or for the good of the world. If a person gains aesthetic talent, or intellectual power, or gains a fortune, he should be firm on the path of virtue, otherwise, he will not see his way rightly, and will be overwhelmed by the problems and responsibilities involved.

A person whose mind is clouded with undesirable emotions is the first victim of those emotions. If he has hatred toward anybody, he is already victimized by that hatred. If he is jealous of anyone, he is already a victim of his own jealousy. Remember these facts well. The moment the undesirable emotions prevail within, they blur the vision, and the right way of life cannot be seen. Hundreds of mistakes will be made in using what has been earned through hard labour.

Vedanta says, that for your own benefit, your material well-being, in whatever form it may be, has to be supported by your moral goodness. When you do this you will get the most out of life. You will utilize your strength, position, power, and knowledge as well as it is possible

for you to utilize them. You may not be very prosperous, but whatever resources you have, external or internal, you will always find yourself in a satisfactory situation. As a result, you will be able to see this life in the right light.

In this life we cannot expect unalloyed joy or unmixed blessing, because, no matter how hard we try, we cannot avoid dual experience. We cannot experience joy and joy alone, freedom and freedom alone. This whole relative universe is composed of dualities. You understand this, but still, deep within your heart there is a cry for eternal life, for complete freedom from all bondage.

Every good in this relative order has a concomitant evil. In order to get out of the bondage of prosperity, for instance, you must understand the bitterness of prosperity. Many say: "Spiritual life comes from defeatism, from frustration." You cannot be spiritual through frustration or defeat. You have to weigh both sides, light and dark. You will find both are short of the ideal. Only then can you turn to spirituality. When you get the most out of this life, then you know the limit of this life, and you find it cannot satisfy your deepest longing for unmixed blessing. Still you are trying to solve the problems of life in this very life. You cannot do it!

There is One who is eternal in the midst of the non-eternal. There is One who is free in the midst of the bound. There is One who, alone, is perfect in all that are imperfect. If you seek perfection, if you seek real freedom, if you seek eternal life, go to the Supreme Being. There is only One. He is the highest, He is the best. Him you are seeking all your life, knowingly or unknowingly, rightly or wrongly. There are many high and higher, many good and better, but the highest is One, the best is One. And That you are seeking. In your search for wealth, you are seeking the highest measure of wealth. Similarly, you are seeking the highest measure of power, the highest measure of beauty. Each time you are trying to satisfy yourself with something limited, but you are doomed to disappointment, because you are not actually the seeker of anything limited. Just as every watercourse is struggling to reach the ocean, similarly, every human mind or individual soul is constantly struggling to reach the Infinite Self, the Soul of all souls. When a person becomes convinced of this, then he can accept God as the goal, the ideal.

This does not necessarily mean that he will abandon all other pursuits of life. A person cannot develop that kind of longing for God, all at once. When we understand something through

the intellect, our emotions still lie within us. They are embedded in the subsoil of the mind very firmly. Even though you recognize the futility of the search for the temporal, the temporal values do not leave you so easily. They cling to your heart persistently.

A person must live in this world, but with a changed outlook. He understands everything temporal as a means, and has an instrumental value. The only ultimate value is the perception of God, so he looks upon this life as a means to that supreme end. He cannot neglect the means since he cares for the end. He takes care of life in this plane, and whatever he does, he does with the object of gaining the ultimate. He becomes more or less dispassionate.

Dispassion does not mean indifference. When you want to reach the roof of the house through the staircase; you cannot neglect the staircase, even though you are really interested not in the staircase, but in the roof. You live in this world, carry on your duties, seek money, beauty, or health, or whatever you need, but know that none of these can be an end in itself.

You live in this world, offering yourself to God. He is the sole Master of the universe. You can claim nothing as your own. This consciousness dawns upon the person who seeks

God as the ideal, as the goal. You know that he alone is eternal amidst the non-eternal, so, naturally, you do not claim the work as your own. "I am just an instrument, it is all his power, that enables me to work."

Because you know God is the sole Master of everything, you do not claim anything to be your own; at best, you are a caretaker for the time being. Even this little body, so dear to us, how little hold we have on that. You surrender everything to God, and live with detachment in the world.

This attitude of detachment is called "karma yoga". Looking upon this life as a means to the attainment of the Highest, the Absolute, surrendering everything to God, this is the practice of karma yoga, work with detachment. It can be done with different mental attitudes, but this is one way of carrying on karma yoga. It becomes a spiritual discipline.

The duties we perform in this life, we perform with detachment, with the object of going above all relativity, all duality. Continuing this practice, the mind is further purified. The observance of moral principles has already purified the mind to a certain extent, and has given you a tendency to seek God. Then you develop another characteristic, inwardness of mind, the power of introspection. You understand what you

really are, not just a physical body or a psychophysical system. You are the experiencer and are of the nature of pure consciousness, because beyond this psychophysical system is the central principle of consciousness that rules over the entire psychophysical system. This integrates all the factors, physical and psychical, into one coherent whole. You become aware of that, and realize that your real self is That.

As you become aware of your real Self as such, you also become aware that this psychophysical system is controlled by a central principle of consciousness, which is the real man. This whole universe is controlled by Supreme Consciousness. Consciousness is the fundamental reality. Matter is not the fundamental reality. Every form of existence requires it to be certified by consciousness. I see the chair, the chair exists. Before the chair exists, I am. I know the chair, therefore, the chair is. No material existence can have existence independent of an observer. Before the observed is there, the observer is there; and the observer is of the nature of consciousness.

The materialistic position that matter is the solid, tangible, fundamental Reality, and everything has come out of matter, your vitality, your mind, your soul, is completely reversed by Vedanta. Consciousness is fundamental, it

cannot be a derivative. Every form of existence presupposes consciousness. Without presupposing consciousness, you cannot establish the reality of anything that is material.

The central fact within you is "I am." A conscious being, the knower of youth, old age, of all the changing conditions of the body and the mind, that you are. A man becomes aware of himself as the knower, as the central principle of consciousness. Behind this changing ego is the unchanging consciousness. That maintains your identity. "I was a little baby, now I am a grownup man." What does it mean? If that little "I" has become grown up, this "I" could not recognize the former "I". But, underlying these changing forms of "I" is one unchanging basis which remains forever the same. That unchanging basis is the real man, beyond all the changing conditions of the body and the mind. You recognize one central Supreme Consciousness holding the entire universe. You realize your kinship or unity with that Supreme Consciousness. Just as at the back of every wave there is one boundless ocean of water, similarly, at the back of every finite centre of consciousness lies Infinite Consciousness. You always know what you are because you are that self-luminous Consciousness. No one has to tell you that you are. If I say, "There is a

chair," you may not believe it; but if I say, "You are not," who will believe me? Because this self is self-evident, being of the nature of luminous consciousness.

A person becomes convinced of this: God, who seems to be far away, is the nearest of the near. Now he knows where to seek God, where to find God. It is true that unless you seek Him, you cannot find Him.

Now you understand that God is the innermost Self, the Soul of all souls. You meditate on Him within you as your innermost self. "The kingdom of God is within you." That does not come with observation. What is outside you can observe, but what is inmost, how can you observe that? You cannot objectify the innermost reality. You cannot objectify God.

God may appear to you in form, but that experience is not the true measure of God-consciousness. You have to realize Him as pure consciousness. To do this you have to go through preliminary courses. First, you have to develop intense longing for God. You intellectually recognize God to be the ideal, it is true, but intellectual recognition is one thing and the heart's longing is another. Second, you have to meditate on Him. Generally, a person is instructed to meditate on Him through a form that represents

divinity to him. Third, you have to further develop your longing for God by different methods of worship.

There are various methods of worship. Whatever suits your capacity, your tendency, your situation in life, you can adopt. There are physical methods, such as association with right types of people who are really interested in God, pilgrimages, and service to holy persons, to the temple of the Lord, offerings of what you love. In offering what you love to God, you actually give your heart. There is a psychological effect of this action. Many do not believe in this ritualistic worship, but this has some meaning. When you daily offer to God some flowers, for instance, which you really like, in offering the flowers you are offering your heart. If you like any special kind of food, in offering that food to God you offer your heart at the same time, more or less. It depends on what kind of devotion you bring to the offering. These physical actions have psychological effects. They will generate devotion within you.

Similarly, you practise on verbal methods. Sing the glory of God, sing devotional songs, say prayers, read scriptures, hear sermons, all are verbal methods of worshipping God. They will help develop devotion within you. You may

accept God intellectually as the goal, but the heart must move forward towards God. There must be a yearning for God. The heart must move with the head. You cannot realize God only through the head for thereby you will only be a scholar at best.

In mental worship you try to remember God as much as possible, and try to practise self-resignation to God as much as possible. You do these practices, and more and more devotion will grow within you. At the same time, you continue the practise of meditation daily. When this devotion is truly developed, you will realize God.

Some posture is necessary for the practice of meditation. One condition of posture is this: your trunk, the neck, and the head should be in one verticle line. The body will then offer the least resistance to the practice of meditation, because all the important organs function rightly, and physical resistance is minimized. Practise moderation in eating, drinking, and sleeping, says Sri Krishna in the Bhagavad-gita. If you work too hard you cannot practise meditation. You should live a very regular, moderate life.

A person requires a symbol for practising concentration of the mind on God. The best symbol is the symbol of the Supreme Being, who is the innermost self. According to Hindu spiritual discipline, a person can also take up a verbal

symbol. If any form represents Divinity to you, that is a viable symbol. Words can also be used. In prayer we use too many words, but as your devotion to God becomes intense, one or two words become enough to concentrate your thoughts on God. If you really understand the significance of the life of Jesus Christ, just the word Jesus will be enough to fill your heart with devotion. If you really love a person, his or her very name is enough to overwhelm you. Struggle to develop that kind of intense feeling. Take up a word; repeat it. It will work on the lower levels of the mind, clarifying the roots of sense attachment, eventually removing them until the mind is pure. Sri Krishna says in the Bhagavad-gita that the person who develops real longing for God and prays to God, through God's grace, he realizes Him. He concentrates his mind on God, carries on the worship of God in different ways, and, at the same time, meditates on God. Then, through God's grace, the veil of darkness that covers the mind will be removed. He will realize God.

It is possible to realize God through His grace, but grace does not dawn upon a person unless one works for it. He is gracious, it is true, but He will not give you anything unless you work for it. Jesus Christ says, "Seek, and ye shall find." Does He not know that we need Him?

If He is all gracious, why does He not come? "Ask, and it shall be given unto you. Knock (very hard!), and it shall be opened unto you." You have to do your own part. He has given you freedom, you must utilize that freedom and develop your longing for God, and then He will grant His grace to you.

When a person develops longing for God and seeks His vision and prays to Him with deep concentration of the mind, God removes from within all veils, and He becomes revealed. There is a passage in the Bhagavad-gita that explains the realization of God through His grace. Sri Krishna, the Divine Being incarnate in human form, says:

> "I am the origin of all. From Me everything evolves. Thus thinking, the wise worship Me with loving consciousness. With their minds fully in Me, with their senses absorbed in Me, enlightening one another and always speaking of Me, they are satisfied and delighted. To them, ever steadfast and serving Me with affection, I give that understanding by which they come unto Me. Out of mere compassion for them, I, abiding in their hearts, remove the darkness born of ignorance by the luminous lamp of knowledge."

The culmination of meditation is called samadhi. In samadhi the distinction between the meditater, the object of meditation, and the process of meditation is obliterated. The self becomes

united with God. There are two kinds of samadhi. In one the devotee realizes himself as belonging to God; in the other kind of samadhi this self becomes completely absorbed in God. The first type is called "savikalpa" samadhi; the other is called "nirvikalpa" samadhi.

One should develop the understanding through the practice of virtue that God is the supreme goal of life. Accept Him as the supreme goal of life, and then develop a longing for reaching God, for realizing God. Unless you have real longing, your mind can never be absorbed in the thought of God. Your mind becomes naturally absorbed in what you love. A mother can, without difficulty, meditate on the beloved child. A devoted wife can, without difficulty, meditate on the husband. A miser can easily meditate on his hoarded treasure.

The one condition that we must understand is that there is one supreme goal of life. Where is the culmination of all knowledge? Where is the fulfilment of all desires? You must know the answer to these questions, and then develop a longing for That. These are practical courses. You just have to adopt the courses and practise them from day to day. You will surely make progress, and ultimately reach the highest goal.

Chapter 5
Good and Evil

The experience of good and evil is a perplexing problem for the human mind. All our life we are trying to solve the problem of good and evil, because every problem is, at bottom, the problem of good and evil. We recognize as good that which appeals to us as agreeable and beneficial, and we consider as evil, generally, that which is disagreeable and harmful. We are trying to overcome want or misery by prosperity, trying to overcome sickness by health, trying to overcome vice by virtue, and so on. But howsoever hard we try we cannot eliminate evil completely.

One of the difficulties in trying to solve this problem is that good and evil appear to be mixed up. Good comes in the garb of evil; evil comes in the garb of good. This world offers many sugar-coated bitter pills. You meet a person and you think he will be a most charming companion for life, but you find very soon that you have caught a tartar. Some food you get to eat tastes

very delicious. If you restrain yourself you are unhappy, but if you eat to your heart's content, you get a stomach ache.

Sometimes good comes in the form of evil. A child wants to play continuously, but the parents put him in school. He does not want to go. However, gradually he becomes interested in study; he works hard and gets a degree. The time finally comes for him to reap the benefit of his hard struggle for an education. In this way, through pain and suffering, or what we may call evil, he gains good.

We should always remember that what is pleasant is not necessarily good, and what is unpleasant is not necessarily evil. We forget this and get into trouble. As soon as something appeals to our senses, we think, yes, this is what we want. There is no reason why it should not be beneficial to us. If there is anything which does not appeal to us, we think it must be evil.

It soon becomes apparent that distinguishing between good and evil is a very serious problem. Then there are certain things in life we cannot get rid of. Death is a settled fact. Unless a person dies a premature death, his youth is sure to be followed by old age. We are clinging to youth and beauty, yet old age is creeping on us.

We are clinging to life, yet death is pursuing us. We are clinging to pleasure, but pain is at our heels. Nobody can deny these facts. If you want to be realistic, you have to acknowledge both sides.

We also find that when we try to eliminate want and secure prosperity, the prosperity itself becomes a problem. Similarly, when you try to maintain your youth and beauty, they (youth and beauty) become a problem. You acquire power, for instance, scientific power, and that power becomes a problem.

What is the way out? There have been many great thinkers in this world, scientists, philosophers, theologians, who suggest different courses in order to get away from the duality of good and evil. There has been a class of philosophers who suggested that we not look on the dark side of life, but see the beautiful sunshine, see the canopy of heaven set with countless luminaries, see the rolling waves and the majestic mountains so sublime, and look on the bright side of life. Think of your youth and beauty and power and knowledge; completely ignore the dark side.

The problem with this is that the dark side does not ignore us. This is not the way to get out of the dilemma of good and evil. Some materialistic philosophers of ancient India used to say,

"Live on milk and honey even though you have to borrow to do it. Live happily as long as you live. Live on butter even if you have to die a debtor." This is not the real solution to the problem. It is false optimism.

Some philosophers say, "There is no evil, evil is for good, evil is a blessing in disguise. Good cometh out of evil, from dirt flowers bloom." But other philosophers take the pessimistic point of view, saying that if flowers come out of dirt, dirt also comes out of flowers. If you keep a flower too long, gradually it will decay. Put in another way: "Every rose has thorns."

Similar statements have been made throughout the Hindu scriptures. "If you try to enjoy too much, it will enervate your system and you will fall sick." "If you have high social standing you will always be afraid of losing it." "If you have much money you will be afraid of the government and the tax you will have to pay." "If you have much talent there will be slanderers to find some fault in you." "If you have too much power, it will generate fear of your rivals."

Some philosophers suggest that evil enhances good. Leibnitz held this theory. Evil enhances beauty. If you have a black background and you paint a picture there, it will bring out the colour of the picture. In this way God has

set good on the background of evil in order to enhance the beauty of good.

The pessimists say, "If evil enhances the beauty of good, then good enhances the ugliness of evil. For the same reason you can say good is also evil. If you want to explain away evil on the ground that evil enhances the beauty of good, then you can explain away good on the ground that good aggravates evil. These are the opposite arguments by the pessimists and the optimists.

Some say that evil is just the negation of good. Evil is nothing—a non-entity. It is simply absence of good, so do not think of evil at all. But is evil in this world just the absence of good? Is hatred just the absence of love? If a person does not love me, shall I say for sure he hates me? Is pain just the absence of pleasure or something more? Is disease just the absence of health or something more?

If good be positive, evil is also positive. Hatred is positive, just as love is also positive. Disease is positive just as health is positive. If you try to explain away evil as just the negation of good, you neglect to explain the neutral stage of mind. You may not love somebody, but that doesn't mean you hate him. You may just be indifferent to him.

There have been philosophers who have held that good is the negation of evil. The Samkhya system of philosophy in India holds this view. According to this system, pleasure is simply the absence of pain—there is no positive pleasure in this world. If you feel hungry, the keener is your appetite, and the more you enjoy the dinner. But it is just the appeasement of your hunger, that's all. So Samkhya says that wherever there is any pleasure, wherever there is any good, it is just the absence of evil, therefore good is also a non-entity.

None of these remedies appear to be satisfactory. In order to solve the problem of good and evil, we should have the right understanding of both. Both are positive and actually exist, yet, they are not separate, cut-and-dried existences. You cannot separate them completely so that you will have beauty and beauty alone, youth and youth alone, life and life alone with no old age. This cannot be. In this world richness and poverty go together, one cannot exist without the other. Just as a parent exists in relation to the child — a person cannot be called parent if he has no child — similarly, the child exists in relation to the parent. There cannot be any child without parents, so the child must have parents. They are relative, one exists in relation to the other, yet they are distinct.

Good and evil are both relative existences, but that does not mean that both are on the same level, that both are exactly the same. The child and the parent are in relation to each other, yet they are not identical. There cannot be any creation unless there is destruction, nor can there be wealth in this world unless there is want. This is the situation. One has to recognize the world as it is.

To illustrate this point, suppose you decide to establish a colony of millionaires. You choose fifty millionaires and put them in an isolated colony. Since they are all millionaires there cannot be any servants, no laundry-man, no housekeeper, no gardener, no employee of any kind. What will happen? Every millionaire will have to take care of himself and his family completely. There is no difference between one millionaire and another, because all are of the same status, and all are participating in the different duties of life, high and low. They will lose all sense of prosperity, and others will not know they are prosperous. How can they know when there are no servants? They are considered to be wealthy only in contrast to those who are not so. But when all are millionaires and no employee is available to do the various chores, there cannot be any distinction between richness

and poverty. Wealth can exist only in relation to poverty. If you eliminate one, the other is bound to disappear.

In another example, you choose one hundred models of feminine beauty. You don't, afterall, like to look at faces that are not very attractive. Why did God create such unattractive faces? Didn't he have any sense? Why didn't He create only beautiful faces? Auguste Comte said, "Had I been with God at the time of creation, I could have given him a much better plan of creation." The pessimistic philosophers thought along that line, that good and evil could be completely separated as if they were cut-and-dried, independent existences. But our contention is this, that one exists in relation to the other. There is distinction between the two, yet they are inter-related, or inter-dependent.

In this colony of models you have done better than God, because all of your models are beautiful! But the next morning you look at what you had thought were one-hundred beautiful faces and you find they are not all equally beautiful. You reject ten of the least beautiful. A few days later you have occasion to scrutinize the remaining ninety beautiful faces and, lo and behold, ten more must be dismissed as not worthy. So it goes, day after day until there are

only two beautiful models left. You study them and find that one is more beautiful than the other. Then you realize that you have differentiated the beautiful from the ugly, and that as long as there will be in this world two individual things and one individual mind, the problem of good and evil will be there.

Actually, good and evil depends on the way we are individually affected. Suppose a tree is cut down and you make a beautiful piece of furniture. It is a creation from your viewpoint, but there were some persons who used to sit under that tree every day, and could relax there. From their standpoint you are doing something very destructive and senseless.

We have to judge things not only from our standpoint, but also from other's standpoint. There cannot be any construction without destruction. They are two aspects of a single process. Can you build a house without destroying something? Count how many trees you destroy. There was a beautiful hillock and you brought rocks from there. What did those who lived there (they are also God's creatures) think of this human venture?

Good and evil depend on the way we judge things. Even an illness considered from one standpoint may be good. Illness smooths the

irregularities of the mind to a great extent. If you have too much power and youth, or beauty, you are liable to be very vain and proud. Illness may tone this down, and, therefore, can be considered good. So our standard of good and evil is not absolute.

We should recognize, first of all, that we live in a world in which good and evil are inter-related. We cannot operate from the utilitarian standpoint, saying, "Let us try to eliminate all evil from the world. The time will come when good alone will exist, and all evil will disappear." Some religions hold the view that evil is the creation of the evil spirit, Satan, and good is the creation of God. They are in a battle and Satan will eventually be completely subjugated and good alone will exist. In that world there will be beauty and beauty alone, prosperity and prosperity alone, youth and youth alone. But it cannot be so, because one exists in relation to the other. With life there is death, with youth there is old age, with rise there is decline. This is the nature of relative existence.

What is the way out? First, you have to view the world honestly. You cannot say that the world is all sunshine and flowers, but neither can you say that it is all darkness and storm. Both exist side by side, inter-related,

yet they are distinguishable. If you want absolute peace and blessedness you have to go beyond this relative order. That is the ideal, that is God.

Here, from our earthly position we experience day and night. As long as we have this earthly position we will experience day and night. The sun, in a sense, is responsible for this day and night, but, at the same time, the sun is beyond day and night. If you go to the sun you will find that this day and night is all a myth. The sun is ever resplendent, beyond night and day. Similarly, beyond this duality, this panorama of light and darkness, of rise and fall, of beauty and ugliness, of order and disorder, there is one Supreme Existence, transcendental, and that is man's ideal. Man is constantly seeking that, he must have that, and that is what we generally call God. When a person addressed Jesus Christ as "Good Master", Jesus replied, "Why do you call me good? God alone is good." What did Jesus mean by this statement? Had he not performed many good acts? Jesus was looking beyond this world with a better vision of reality. He was saying that beyond this play of dualities there is one Transcendental Existence that is absolute Consciousness, absolute Existence, absolute Bliss.

This plane of duality is not an ideal in itself, but it should not be ignored or neglected. It has to be utilized as a means to attain that ideal, the Transcendental Reality. As long as you hold to this dual phenomenal existence as the ideal of life, you cannot have just one side of the coin of dualities, you must have both sides. You will sway in the plane of dualities continuously, without rest. This is the very nature of the relative existence, and through this you will have to go beyond.

You have seen that though good exists in relation to evil, and evil exists in relation to good, they are not identical. The way out of this quandary is to overcome evil by good, and from good go beyond good to the Transcendental Reality. You cannot go directly from evil to the Transcendental Reality. Remember this. You have to overcome sickness by health; health is nearer to that Reality than sickness. If you are constantly in want, you cannot reach that Reality. You have to solve the problem of your essential needs if you want to transcend this plane of duality. If you want to reach that high plane of existence, vice will not help you; from virtue alone can you reach there.

Here and now you have good and evil. If you are on the level of evil, first of all, step up

to the level of good, and then step to the Transcendental level. This point has to be understood thoroughly. Here, also, another distinction has to be made. There is physical well-being; there is intellectual well-being; there is moral well-being; and there is spiritual well-being. We have to recognize the relative importance of these varieties of good.

Physical well-being is necessary, no doubt about that. When the question of moral well-being comes up, which will have the priority? If we think that physical well-being or material well-being is as good as moral well-being, we shall make a mistake. Moral well-being is much closer to spiritual well-being than material well-being. However charming and fascinating material well-being may be, it cannot take you to the Transcendental plane. From the plane of material well-being, you have to reach the plane of moral well-being.

Another point is this — material well-being is insecure without moral well-being. This world may have any amount of prosperity, any amount of physical power, but if it does not recognize the necessity of moral integrity, there cannot be any peace. What is the basic problem of human life in the world? The basic problem of human life is psychological, not physical or biological.

We find so much difficulty in coming to terms between nations in regard to arms control, etc., because we do not emphasize the importance of inner goodness and inner integrity. We stress the material interests. Every nation does this and loses an effective diplomacy thereby. A great statesman once said, "All international problems are basically moral problems." Everything hinges on moral integrity. Without that there is no material security.

Suppose a person has a large amount of wealth but no moral integrity. He will not have right understanding of the use of his wealth, and it will be a curse instead of a blessing. Power misused is a curse, wealth misused is a curse, beauty misused is a curse, intellect misused is a curse. Our physical well-being, our material well-being, and our intellectual well-being must be supported by moral integrity, otherwise the entire life will be insecure. You may have a very keen intellect, but if you don't have right understanding you will just be a clever animal.

There seems to be a lack of far-sightedness in the world today, and that is largely due to lack of moral integrity. Moral principles are usually adhered to as long as they don't conflict with material interests, but if you want to reach

the Transcendental plane, material interests will have to be sacrificed for the sake of moral principles.

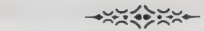
You have to recognize the distinction between good and evil, but do not hold to this relative good as life's ideal, as an end in itself. The moment you take this attitude toward the world, you will not be emotionally involved, either in good or evil. Both will be viewed as part of a passing show. If you take this attitude, honour and dishonour will not affect you as they affect you now. Want and prosperity will not affect you as they affect you now. You may have prosperity but you will not be elated, because you will know that prosperity is not the goal of life. By the same token, you will not be depressed by loss of fortune.

One great advantage you will have from this attitude toward life is that you will be much less perturbed, and you will have true peace and poise. You will work out your way toward the Goal Supreme keeping firm upon the path of virtue, never sacrificing virtue for the sake of material gain. A person with the right attitude gains true health, true understanding, and lives happily in this world. Mere prosperity does not make us happy, it is the inner attitude that matters. If that attitude is

wanting, one can be unhappy in spite of wealth. Some of the wealthiest families are the unhappiest.

After understanding this situation, we have to cultivate good health, right understanding, and moral virtue, knowing for certain that all these three are intended to lead us to the Transcendental plane. We shall rightly utilize this life, and at the same time, we shall go beyond this life to where there is no death, no old age, no evil of any kind. The present world has its own value; it is a means to an end. It is more or less like a hospital. As long as you are not cured of the malady of worldliness, you have to live in this world. You have to come here again and again. When you are cured completely, you go to your eternal home. Now, as a hospital, it can be a model, but it cannot be a model home for permanent residence. That is the difference. We make a mistake and think it a permanent place. Actually, it is a place you come to for moral and spiritual exercise. It is not just a playground, it is a school. We make the mistake of thinking that it is just a place for play, for enjoyment, and pleasure. If it is a playground, it is a playground of a very tough school where there are very tough teachers to give you very tough lessons!

This is the position of the world. It can be likened to a factory where divine persons are created out of brutes. You cannot call it an ideal home, for here we have to work our way to a goal beyond this level. By solving the problem of good and evil, we shall reach the Supreme Reality.



Chapter 6

Divine Law and Divine Grace

Divine law and divine grace are evidently incompatible. Law means enforcement of justice, while grace means bestowal of mercy. How can these two ideas be compatible? If God be all-just, can he be all-merciful at the same time? Justice is conditional. As you sow, so shall you reap. If you do good deeds you experience good results; if you do evil deeds you suffer from evil consequences. Mercy and grace, however, are unconditional. Yet, there are the scope of law and the scope of mercy in the Divine Scheme of the universe, particularly, in the Divine Scheme of human affairs.

Law is universal, so law with regard to all human beings must be the same. It is not that one nation is governed by certain laws and another nation is governed by other laws. Nor is it that one particular individual is governed by certain laws, and another individual is governed by another set of laws or rules. The same law governs all human beings. What is that law? The

Hindus call it "The law of karma." You reap the good and evil consequences of your own deeds. None can escape this inevitable law.

A person can refrain from performing evil deeds and perform good deeds instead; that is within his limited freedom. Every human being has a certain amount of freedom which is absent at the subhuman level. In the subhuman level all activities are instinctive. In the human level there are instinctive activities; there are autonomous operations of the physical and mental system; there are reflex actions; and there are also self-determined actions.

Man has the special privilege, however limited that privilege may be, of judging things. He may not be able to use the power rightly, always, but he has the power to judge what is right and what is wrong. He also has the power, to a great extent, to follow his judgement and act according to his decision. God has given all of us this limited freedom. This freedom, as illustrated by Sri Ramakrishna, is like the freedom of an animal, a cow, for instance, which is tied to a post. Within the limited scope of the rope, the cow can graze, lie down, or stand up. Similarly,every human individual has certain limited freedom.

By exercising his limited freedom, a person can avoid evil deeds and perform good deeds.

When he performs good deeds, he naturally reaps the benefits of those deeds, here and elsewhere. Those deeds (good or bad) are sure to produce an effect, because every action performed leaves an indelible impression on the mind. The more interest a person has in the action, the more attention he or she will pay to the activity, and the deeper will be the impression.

These impressions are constantly being stored within us, not only from our actions, deliberate, conscious actions, but also from our experiences. The impressions gathered are the source of our memories; they form our disposition as well as our talents. If you try to play on a musical instrument persistently, you develop the talent and the power to play efficiently on that instrument. It is so in regard to every action we perform repeatedly. Even if we don't perform an action repeatedly, even if is performed just once, that will also leave some impression on the mind.

These impressions fructify in course of time and create favourable or unfavourable situations here or in the hereafter, depending on the nature of the impressions. Of course, nobody gathers only wrong impressions, because nobody performs wholly wrong deeds. By the same token, nobody performs all right deeds, so the resulting impressions are of mixed character.

Suppose a person, by repeated effort succeeds in conquering his evil tendencies by performing mostly good deeds. As an effect of this he will have good experiences here and elsewhere. But whatever situation a person may have by virtue of his activities, however good these activities may be, he is still in bondage. These activities have a limited force, they cannot take you beyond the sphere of bondage, beyond this sphere of interdependence.

Every action has a limited force, therefore, it cannot produce unlimited, eternal results. Eternal life cannot be the product of any action, because action is limited. By virtue of your good deeds, you can attain some situation hereafter, but that situation, also, will be another state of bondage, however high it may be. For example, no matter how high a position you may occupy, it is still a situation of bondage. Just as, ugliness may be overcome by beauty, yet beauty forms another snare.

We live in a world of interdependence. We cannot go beyond this range of interdependence simply by good deeds, because good deeds have their own limitation. Every kind action requires some misery to function. Kindness coexists with evil. Forgiveness requires some wrong deed, otherwise, it cannot be exercised. All these moral

virtues have their limitations. They are conditionally good, not absolutely good.

When a well-to-do person approached Jesus Christ, saying, "Good Master, how can I inherit eternal life?" Jesus immediately answered, "Why do you call me good? God alone is good." Nothing in this universe is absolutely good. If you wish to be as perfect as the Father in Heaven is perfect, you have to reach Him. Simply by good deeds you cannot fulfil your deepest longing for eternity, your deepest longing for perfection, for absolute freedom from all bondages.

Though we have limited freedom of performing action, nothing can be done without the Divine Power. But that Divine Power does not interfere in human actions; it is to a great extent neutral. At the back of every action there is the Divine Power, the source of all power. The power by which a person steals, and the power by which a hungry man is fed, are both derived from God, yet God is unaffected. Through His power you eat, you see, you think, you feel. All this goes on, yet God is unaffected. How can this be?

In a steel mill you see different parts of the machinery operating in various ways, but no part operates without the driving force of electricity. This electricity, however, is neutral in its power. For instance, you have a light bulb. With the help

of the light bulb you can do a wrong deed, or a right deed. Without light you cannot do anything, yet, the light is not responsible for either act. Similarly, behind all our actions, behind all our knowledge, there is the same Divine knowledge, the same Divine Power, yet, that power is neutral, unaffected. Just as the electricity is not responsible for the various operations that go on in the different parts of the machinery—one part may draw water, another may clean a place, or remove filth even—the same power working through the individual functions in one way, and through another individual functions another way. The difference is not in the real power but in the medium through which it functions.

For all these differences we, as individuals, are responsible. Our psychophysical constitution is responsible, but the Lord is everywhere. His power is functioning everywhere. His knowledge is everywhere. Through His knowledge the thief steals; through His knowledge the robber kills; through His knowledge the saint saves the sinners. That one knowledge functions in different ways through different minds.

A person working in this world and trying to be free from all evil deeds, can have recourse to good deeds, and then he realizes the limitations of good deeds also. He realizes that simply

by good deeds one cannot go beyond bondages. As his mind is purified and he gains experiences, he becomes conscious of the limitation of his own ego.

He used to deny God, ignore God. He thought he was the maker of his own destiny; not only so, he thought he was the maker of the destiny of the world. The ego is inflated to such an extent, that we not only hold ourselves responsible for our own individual lives, but we hold ourselves responsible for the world, as if the world cannot get along without our help!

When the mind is purified through the performance of right action, when a person realizes the limitation of right actions, he realizes the limitation of his own individual power and knowledge. He realizes that at the back of all individuals there is one source of all power, all knowledge, all life, all beauty. When he realizes this, then he knows that if a person wants true freedom, then he has to seek where there is absolute freedom. He has to seek that Supreme Being who is absolutely good. Nothing else is good in the absolute sense. Even Jesus Christ himself, out of his extraordinary humility, did not assert himself as good, as God.

When a person becomes conscious of his own limitation and becomes conscious of the

Divine Source, he turns his thoughts toward that source. There is the real freedom, there is the real light, there is the real blessedness. Then this ego is very much curbed, and a person can surrender himself to the Supreme Lord. When a person attains this stage, he enters into the realm of Grace.

As long as a person holds to this ego, law governs him. When he surrenders this ego to the Supreme Lord, then he enters into the sphere of Grace. He cannot be held responsible for his own actions. Actually, when a person surrenders the ego to the Lord, wrong actions become impossible, if the surrender is complete. However, he cannot attain self-surrender all at once. This is normally done gradually. As this develops, his actions become naturally pure, naturally good. Since he does not claim the actions to be his own, he knows that God is the Supreme Ruler, the Supreme Master. "Whatever knowledge I have belongs to Him, whatever power I hold belongs to Him." When he has this attitude, he does not claim any action to be his own, and the results of the action do not affect him anymore.

Such action does not create an indelible impression in the heart. He works out the past impressions, but he does not gather any new impressions. He is not affected by his own deeds,

even. Actions react on the doer because a return of some kind is expected, so the actions come back as a result. If they are given up, these actions will not have a reaction. In this way he enters into the realm of Grace, and his actions no longer bind him. His actions become naturally pure and non-binding, and he looks upon this relative existence, this human life, as a stairway to reach the Supreme Ideal. He does not look upon wealth, or beauty, or youth as ideals in themselves.

The attainment of Grace is possible for anyone who can cultivate the spirit of self-surrender, and accept the Supreme Being as the sole goal, the sole refuge, the sole ideal. God expects this much from you, that by exercising your freedom you come to sacrifice your freedom when you realize its limitation. When you forego this ego and surrender yourself to Him, then Divine Grace comes. Those who perform right deeds, those who perform their duties, those who associate with the right types of persons, read religious literature, perform the worship of God, they generally develop this spirit of self-resignation.

God's grace is ready to descend on anyone. There is no partiality here, but you do not open your door. The sunlight is there, ready to enter your room, but you do not open the window. As

Sri Ramakrishna says, "The breeze of God's grace is constantly blowing, but you have to unfurl the sail of the vessel of life to get the benefit." That much one has to do, and for that you have limited freedom. Jesus Christ says, "Ask and it shall be given to you." But why do I have to ask? He could easily open the door. God knows our limitations, and the greatest limitation is this defiance, denying Him, thinking, "I am the master. Without God's help I can get along very well in this world."

The spirit of defiance, grace cannot meet. Grace is too tender for that. Grace comes when there is humility, when there is submission; otherwise the law will function. In the Divine Scheme of things there is the scope of the law, and there is the scope of mercy. As long as you hold to your ego, the law will take care of you, but when you surrender yourself to the Supreme Lord, then His Grace will descend on you.

Self-surrender must be genuine; there is false self-surrender, also. If you do something good and reap the good results, you think, "I have done this and I am reaping the benefit of my own deeds." But, if something goes wrong and you suffer, then you say, "Oh, God has made me suffer in this world." This kind of resignation to God will not do. Good and evil, both, have to be

surrendered completely. With all your weaknesses and excellences you must surrender to God. You should not hold back the weaknesses and present only the excellences to God. "Whether I am evil or I am good, whether I am wise or unwise, pure or impure, I surrender myself to Thee completely." You cannot approach God with only your credentials. With all your weaknesses and excellences you have to surrender yourself to God, and at once Grace will descend upon you.

Sri Krishna says in the Bhagavad-gita, "Even a sinful person, if he worships Me with unswerving devotion, must be regarded as righteous, for he has formed the right resolution. He soon becomes righteous and attains eternal peace. Proclaim it boldly, O son of Kunti, that my devotees never perish."

The question may be asked, "How can a sinful person surrender himself to God?" This human nature is very intricate. No human mind is absolutely bad; no human mind is absolutely good. A person who is generally very good may be overpowered temporarily by evil tendencies through a particular set of circumstances, and will appear to be a very wicked person at that time. But those who can look into the bottom of the mind, can see that underneath these weaknesses

there are strong points, excellences. We find in the lives of the great saviours many fallen persons have been blessed by them—they have received God's Grace.

In the life of Jesus Christ, Mary Magdalen received His Grace. In the life of Sri Ramakrishna, also, such persons received His Grace. It is the one great characteristic of great personalities that they judge others by their strong points and it is the characteristic of small persons that they judge others by their weak points. I had the blessed privilege of sitting at the feet of some great personalities and I saw them always judge individuals by their strong points, never their weak points.

Sri Krishna says again and again, "If a person can surrender himself to Me he will receive my Grace. But those who consecrate all their actions to Me, regarding me as the Supreme Goal, and who worship Me, meditating on Me with single-minded concentration - to them whose minds are thus absorbed in Me, verily I become, ere long, the Saviour from the death-fraught ocean of the world."

When a person foregoes this ego and knows the Lord to be the Supreme Master of everything, and when he does not expect to gain from the results of his own actions, which he performs

as an offering to the Lord, then he is no longer bound by his actions. His actions purify him and he receives God's Grace more and more.

It is extremely difficult to cross this world of Maya, this world of relativity, where good and evil coexist. We try to eliminate evil completely and find that we cannot do it. "Verily, this Divine Maya of Mine, consisting of the three gunas, sattva, rajas, and tamas, is hard to overcome; but those who take refuge in Me alone, shall cross over this Maya." Whole-hearted surrender to God is necessary; half-hearted surrender will not do. There is a story that illustrates this point.

There was a well-to-do person who had a beautiful garden. He was very fond of his garden in which he had a selection of chosen plants. One day a stranger came that way and saw the garden from a distance and began to praise the garden with such phrases as, "What a beautiful garden." "Flowers are in bloom even when they would not be expected." The gentleman who owned the garden, heard the man and immediately came forward. "Is this your garden?" the stranger asked. "Oh, yes. Would you like to see the rest of it?" The stranger replied, "Yes, you must have many visitors to view this beautiful garden."

It so happened that a day or two before, a bull had entered the garden and was destroying some of his favourite plants. In a fit of anger he dealt the bull such a blow on the head with his shovel that the bull fell down dead. He was filled with remorse that he had killed a bull, but he excused himself with the idea that it is God's power that works through the hand, so he was not responsible. He went away and forgot all about the bull.

Now he was escorting the stranger through the garden, showing him the different plants, when they came upon the very spot where the dead bull lay. The stranger exclaimed, "Who has killed this bull?" Then the owner of the garden said, "God, the presiding deity of the hand, the agent of God."

Just at that time, the stranger, who was actually the King of Justice in disguise, assumed his true form, and said, "You excuse yourself with the idea that the presiding deity of the hand killed the bull, yet you claim all these plants to be your own and that this beautiful garden is all your own doing. Nowhere have you mentioned the name of God except in the killing of the bull. You are a hypocrite, and you will have to pay for your deed."

This kind of hypocritical self-surrender cannot lead to God's Grace. Sri Krishna says,

"Abandon all dharmas, completely surrender all legalities, and come to me for shelter. I will deliver you from all sins. Do not grieve."

How grace dawns upon the devotee's heart and lights the lamp of knowledge, Sri Krishna has expressed, "I am the origin of all. From Me all things proceed. The wise know this and worship Me with all their heart."

When this consciousness dawns upon a person, he naturally foregoes his ego and accepts God as the Supreme Ruler of everything. Sri Krishna continues, "With their heart fixed on Me, with their life absorbed in Me, enlightening one another about Me, and always conversing about Me, they derive satisfaction and delight. On those who are ever devoted to Me, and worship Me with love, I bestow the yoga of understanding by which they come to Me. Solely out of compassion for them I, dwelling in their hearts, dispel with the shining lamp of wisdom the darkness born of ignorance."

This is how Divine Grace descends upon human hearts. The way is made through self-surrender. God has given us freedom for doing good deeds and evil deeds, as well as freedom to surrender this ego to the Supreme Lord. When a person really surrenders his ego to the Supreme Lord, then Divine Grace descends upon

him. Until then a person is under the scope of law.

St. Paul said in his Epistle to the Romans, "Sin shall not have dominion over you for ye are not under law, but under Grace." You perform wrong deeds with some selfish motive. When you hold to this ego you become selfish and selfishness leads to wrong deeds; unselfishly, you will not injure others. When you surrender this ego to the Lord, your actions naturally become pure. When God's power flows through this particular ego-consciousness, then it becomes coloured or discoloured, and it functions in different ways. When you surrender this ego to God, or attune this individual self to the Supreme Being, then divine power, divine knowledge flowing through this individual self is not discoloured anymore. It retains its innate purity. St. Paul says, "Sin shall not have dominion over you, ye are not under law, but under grace." You are under grace because you have taken refuge in Him. You are not holding to your ego, you are surrendering all to Him.

A person may gain material possessions, but these are not considered to be the true manifestation of God's Grace in one's life. God's Grace in the true sense comes in the form of spiritual treasures, treasures that do not rust or rot,

which nobody can take away from you. He gives spiritual treasures. Through his Grace one can have material benefits, but the real indication of God's Grace is spiritual illumination, inner purity, inner strength, inner joy, inner light; but that does not come until one really surrenders oneself to God.

Both justice and grace operate in the scheme of life. As long as a person holds to his ego, justice takes care of him, but when he surrenders himself to the Supreme Lord, then Grace descends upon him, and his mind becomes more and more purified. He becomes the very channel for the expression of Divine Power, Divine Knowledge, Divine Freedom, and Divine Strength. We should not think that because God is all-just, he cannot be all-merciful at the same time.

Chapter 7

The Mystery of Maya

The relation between God and the world has been a difficult problem for philosophers and theologians. This world is not self-explanatory. We need God to explain this world. We cannot explain the many without the one. We cannot explain the change without the changeless. We cannot explain the effect without the cause. We need God to explain all these things, but when we acknowledge the existence of God, we find a great difficulty in relating the imperfect world with the perfect God. This problem Vedanta has tried to solve through the concept of "Maya".

According to maya, this world is an "appearance", but by the term appearance is not meant that the world is quite false. It is unreal, but it is not absolutely false. For instance, you may be lying down at home and be dreaming that you are in a wilderness and that a ferocious animal has followed you to your wilderness home. All this is, in a sense, false, but

not absolutely false, because it is not pure and simple imagination. If you do not dream anything and say, "Yes, I dreamed," it is absolutely false. Dream has some reality, though it is not of the same order of reality as waking experience, but it is not as false as "the son of a barren woman." No, it is real to all appearance. As long as you dream, dream is the reality.

You may experience pain and pleasure during a dream. Your dream water is good to quench your thirst. Dream food can appease your hunger. So everything is real as long as you dream. You know the falsity of dream experience only when you wake up. Similarly, as long as we are in the present state of consciousness, as long as we are in ignorance of the Supreme Reality, this world is real for all practical purposes. You know its falsity only when you wake up to the Supreme Reality. When mystics realize the Supreme Reality, God, they know that God alone exists, and that nothing else is real in the absolute sense.

To summarize the discussion so far, we can say that Vedanta holds that this world is unreal, but it has an apparent existence and is only real for your present state of consciousness. It is not real in the state of Supreme Knowledge, because at that point it disappears—so this present appearance is false. The mysterious principle,

maya, however, reconciles these two apparently contradictory existences, God and the world.

This world rests in the unchanging, perfect Supreme Being but it doesn't affect the Supreme Being. When a stump of a tree appears to a thief as a policeman, that apparent policeman doesn't bring about any change in the stump of the tree. When a mirage appears in the desert, not a single grain of sand is moistened by that mirage of water. Similarly, in the present state of ignorance we are not awakened to the Supreme Existence. So far as reality is concerned, in this state of ignorance we are perceiving this world which is not Ultimate Reality, but which is resting upon Supreme Reality, Perfect Existence, just as a mirage rests upon the sand.

Yet it is real for all of us. As long as we are in the state of dreaming we cannot deny the existence. We have to abide by its laws. It is real for all practical purposes. Everything is real as long as you are not awakened to the Supreme Reality. This awakening which is pronounced by the great saints and seers, establishes the truth, that the world is an appearance because when they wake up they find that only God, that one Supreme Being alone exists. Nothing else exists. There is a state of spiritual consciousness in which this world and God exist side-by-side. These

saints and seers know that God transcends this world which He holds, but still He is not affected by the world. It is this experience of the great mystics that proves the unreality of the world.

Is the world a mere void? Vedanta says "No", because it is the Supreme Reality that appears as such. There is no "non-being." When the seers realize the Supreme Reality, or Brahman, this apparent existence vanishes into Brahman. A thief may mistake a trunk of a tree for a policeman, but on closer examination he always finds that the stump is only a stump, after all. Actually, then what we perceive as the world is really God. Because of our ignorance we perceive the Supreme Reality as this imperfect existence, but it is none other than the Supreme Being. He alone exists. Nothing else exists in the absolute sense.

What is the origin of this maya? It cannot be determined because the individual self is also the creation of maya. Just as this objective universe is the creation of maya, so this individualized self is also the creation of maya. Just as this outer world is apparent existence, similarly, the individualized self is apparent existence, because you, the experiencer, the knower, always identify yourself with the known, with this psychophysical complex.

If I ask you, "What are you?" You may answer, "I am Mr. So-and-so. I am dark (or fair), I weigh so many pounds, I am subject to birth, growth, decay, death, hunger, thirst, heat, cold." But is this your real Self? Are you not the experiencer, the knower of this body? Are you not the knower of the mind? Do you not observe the physical conditions, the mental conditions, just as you observe the material objects? Do you not see through the eyes? Do you not hear through the ears? How can you identify yourself with the instruments? How can you, the experiencer, the knowing Self, identify yourself with that changing known? This is mysterious. You who dwell in this body identify yourself with this dwelling house, the body. You, the ruler of the body and the mind, identify yourself with the ruled. This is your apparent self. This psychophysical self is your apparent self. Yet, such is the mystery of maya that you, the experiencer, the knower, you the conscious being, identify yourself with this unconscious being. This individualized self which identifies itself with the body and the mind is also the creation of ignorance, the creation of that mysterious principle. Just as this objective universe is an apparent existence, similarly, this individualized self is also the apparent person. At the root of both is maya.

This individualized self, being the creation of maya, cannot know maya. At the very root of individuation is maya. When this individualized self realizes the Supreme Reality, he is beyond ignorance, beyond maya. As long as his individualized maya is at the root of individuation, he cannot determine what maya is. Maya is inexplicable. It is beginningless.

There is no relationship actually between the apparent and the real, still, it seems to exist. The apparent relationship is relationship of superimposition. There is no relationship between the apparent sun and the real sun. The sun you see moving in the sky, the sun that appears sometimes as bright, sometimes as dim, sometimes large, sometimes small, that moving, changing sun is the apparent sun. The relationship between the changing sun and the real sun is simply superimposition, simply appearance. The apparent sun doesn't bring about any change in the real sun. The sun is ever stationary, resplendent. The moving, changing sun rests in the real sun. It is because of the real sun that all the appearances of the sun are possible, but these appearances do not affect the Reality in the least. One Reality is divided into this two-fold existence, the subject and the object. Its beginning cannot be determined. In fact, it is beginningless

because it is with maya that time begins. Beyond maya is the timeless Supreme Reality.

There is the individualized self, and there is also the world. You cannot deny the existence of the world. When you acknowledge the existence of this individualized self, you must also acknowledge the existence of the world. The one goes with the other. With the world you should also know there must be a Supreme Ruler. There must be some entity who coordinates all the different activities and movements of this universe. So behind this individual self and the objective world there is one Supreme Ruler. These three existences go together: the individualized self; the objective universe; and the ruler of the universe.

You may doubt the existence of the world; you may doubt the existence of God; but you never doubt your own existence. It is self-evident I exist. With this "I" the world also exists. With the world there must be One who integrates the diversities, who unifies the many. Therefore, there is God also. These three form the relative existence. Almost all schools of thought acknowledge these three categories of existence—the individual self, the world, and God.

According to non-dualistic Vedanta, all these three rest through maya, and these three form the relative existence. If you acknowledge the

world, you have to acknowledge its ruler, God. If you acknowledge God as the ruler and creator, you must acknowledge the world and also the created beings. But none of these three is the absolute reality, because they are interdependent or interrelated. Anything that is related is a dependent existence. God as the creator of the universe is not an absolute reality. When there is no creation, does God exist? How can He who is timeless be absolutely related to that which is conditioned by time? God's relationship with this universe is temporarily apparent, not intrinsically.

These three (the individual, the world, and God) exist in the Absolute Reality through a certain principle which is called "maya". Ultimate Reality is absolute Supreme Being, timeless beyond all touch of manifoldness, beyond all touch of change of any kind. In this present state of consciousness we cannot deny relative existence. There are individuals that are in the world; there is also the Ruler of the world. All these three do not form Ultimate Reality. The Ultimate Reality is absolutely perfect Supreme Being, beyond all change, beyond time, beyond space. Yet these three which constitute relative existence rest on the Supreme Reality. That is, that Supreme Reality, Absolute Being, associated with

maya is the Ruler of the universe. Associated with maya He forms the world, and forms the individuals. He forms this tri-partite existence through maya.

As long as you are the jiva, the individualized self, you have to worship the Supreme Ruler, the Ruler of maya. The Bhagavad-gita says, "It is extremely difficult to go beyond this bondage of maya. But anyone who seeks refuge in Me, surrenders himself to Me, gets out of the bondage of maya." As long as a person is in bondage, as long as he doesn't realize the unity with the Supreme Being, he has to worship God, the Lord of maya. Through His grace he can go beyond this world of death and misery.

Maya is not wholly bad. The entire relative existence belongs to maya. In the Absolute there is no duality of good and evil, of pain and pleasure, of life and death, of light and darkness. All duality belongs to this relative existence held up by maya. Just as evil belongs to the realm of maya, so good also belongs to it. God is absolute goodness. He is beyond relative good. If there is anything that is absolutely good, that is God. Everything else that is good, is relatively good. In this relative world in order to overcome relative evil you have to attain to relative good, because this world is maya.

This world of maya is not entirely false, nor is it entirely evil. You have both light and darkness, etc. Maya keeps you in bondage, but it is through maya that you get out of bondage. If you turn to the evil side of maya, you will be wrong. You will be drifting downstream. If you turn to the good side of maya, practising virtue and devotion to God, you will be travelling upstream to get out of the rough water of the world. It is your choice, drift downward into rough water, or struggle upstream to the calm headwaters. When you reach the shore you are out of the water completely. Maya has been conceived in two distinct aspects, maya that binds, and maya that frees. The maya that frees you is the brighter aspect of maya.

Maya does not mean that the world is false in the absolute sense. It is not as false as the son of a barren woman. It is real to all practical purposes as long as you do not have the knowledge of the Ultimate Reality. It is real as long as you are in this bondage of the world. To say the world is unreal doesn't mean it is absolutely false because it is the Supreme Reality that appears as such. When the mystic realizes Brahman, the Supreme Reality, the world vanishes into Brahman. What happens when a person who sees

the stump of a tree as a policeman, suddenly recognizes the stump of a tree as the stump of a tree? The policeman becomes the stump of the tree. In a similar manner the world vanishes in Brahman because Brahman is Reality.

Then again, when we say the world is maya, it doesn't mean that it is all bad. It means that in this maya there is a cause of bondage, and also a cause of freedom. You have to overcome the dark side by the brighter side. Both are real for you; you cannot ignore it. As long as you acknowledge the one, the other also is true for you. When you know yourself to be real, and you know this world to be real, God is real for you as the Ruler of the universe, and so the worship of God is real for you.

Just as the absolute perfect Supreme Being is real when He is realized beyond this relative existence, similarly, in this present state of relative consciousness God is also real for those in bondage. The way to get out of bondage is the worship of the Supreme Reality. It is true there is one Reality that appears as the universe, as the individualized knowing self, that appears as the Ruler of the universe. Yet, as long as you acknowledge one of these three, you have to acknowledge the other two also. There is a fourth entity that must be recognized which is the basic

reality in all the three because it is the three aspects of that Ultimate Reality.

This truth is very beautifully expressed in one of the Upanishads, "Just as fire entering into many different forms appears different—if it enters a long wire, it appears long; if it enters into a round urn, it appears round; if it enters into a piece of charcoal which is irregular in shape, it appears irregular in form—similarly, all these forms created by maya are penetrated and permeated by one Reality. That Reality appears as manifold, diverse things and beings." The Upanishad says further, "Just as air entering into different rooms and different receptacles appears to be different; just as the pure sky entering into different forms appears different, similarly, that which is the Reality, manifesting itself through various forms which are the creation of maya, appears different, but still it is always transcendent in perfect Being. It is transcendentally perfection itself, totally infinite, never affected. Just as the light of the sun, entering into various eyes, reveals various objects and is not in the least affected by the defects of the eyes or qualities of the objects. Similarly, that Supreme Reality, though manifesting in various objects through the prism of maya, remains intact, intrinsically pure.

This is how Vedanta explains the relation between the One and the many, between the Changeless and the changeful, between the finite and the Infinite. This relationship has been one of the chief problems of philosophers and rational theologians. By no means can you say this universe has been created by the perfect God. How can a perfect Being create an imperfect world? How can the timeless, unchanging Reality produce anything conditioned by time? What relationship can there be between Supreme Reality and this existence conditioned by time and duality?

That we are living in ignorance is a self-evident truth. We are not acquainted with the Supreme Reality, and we don't have the direct knowledge of the Real Self. The root of this ignorance is the principle of maya. That ignorance creates this bifurcation in the Supreme Reality, the bifurcation of subject and object. With the subject and object comes the ruler, God. Beyond these three is the Supreme Absolute which exists as one without a second, beyond maya.

Chapter 8

Reason, Volition, and Emotion

Reason, volition, and emotion are different powers of the mind. These feelings, broadly speaking, come under two distinct heads: repulsion and attraction. Emotion is the capacity for feeling. There are emotions which attract us to the objects that we experience, such as kindness, charity, love. There are emotions which repel us such as hatred, anger, jealousy, fear. The emotions have motive force, but they are blind.

Volition is associated with decision. You decide, and then follow the course as far as you can. Your decision may or may not be right. Whenever you exercise your "will" you come to a decision, and then follow the course with determination. If a person asks you to leave your seat, you may not leave your seat, you may stand up, or you may go elsewhere. You may follow someone's bidding, or you may not follow his bidding, or you may do it in a contrary way.

There are three choices for an individual when he exercises volition.

Reason is the power to think cogently in an ordered way. This power of thinking in an ordered way leads the mind to comprehend things rightly, and, hence, judge them rightly. It leads to right comprehension, right judgment, and to right conclusions. Strictly, inference is said to be the power of drawing conclusions from premises. Though this is not the whole function of reason (to draw conclusions, inferences) yet, reason enables us to distinguish between right and wrong, between the real and the apparent, between what is pleasant and what is good, between the temporal and the eternal. Reason has a very important place in human life.

Volition must be under the guidance of reason, and emotion should also be guided by reason, but emotion has to be controlled by volition. For instance, one can judge something by reason. Reason develops into right decision, right determination. In a very difficult situation one can solve the problem, and come to a right decision, and determine what course is to be taken to solve the problem. Reason in a developed state is called, in Vedanta, "buddhi", sometimes translated as "right understanding". This buddhi is highly praised in Vedanta, for if you have

developed right understanding there is no problem you cannot solve, no difficulty from which you cannot escape.

In the Upanishads there is a prayer which speaks of this power of right understanding, this salutary understanding. "He who is the origin of even the presiding deities, the intelligent forces that guide the various aspects of the cosmos, from whom all these deities arise and by whom they are sustained, who is the sole ruler of the entire universe, who is the terror of evil, through whose grace you go beyond all darkness, all bondages, who is the great seer to whom the present and the past and future are always revealed, and who, in the beginning of the world, created the cosmic soul — may that Supreme Consciousness endow us with salutary understanding."

Again, in the Upanishads, there is another prayer praising salutary understanding. "Who, though one and formless, without any purpose of His own, who has no unfulfilled desire to fulfil (no purpose to achieve because He is the perfection of existence, yet creates this variation of forms, this differentiation by his manifold power), who, in the beginning creates this universe, and at the end withdraws the whole creation unto Himself; may that Supreme Being endow us with salutary understanding" If one

has salutary understanding, right understanding, one has the very key to the solution of every problem.

One may have this power of reasoning and decision-making, still, there may be difficulty because of old habits and wrong tendencies that do not allow one to follow the dictates of reason. The emotions stand in the way. The will-power is not strong enough to control the emotions. Despite the protestation of the will, despite the remonstrance of reason, the emotions lead one in the opposite direction. A person must be very patient and intelligent to control the emotions and guide the will.

A person should try to develop his will-power. Unless his will-power is strong he cannot deal with the emotions successfully. Will-power can be developed in many ways. Anything you do systematically, for the development of the body and the mind, from day to day, develops your will power. Any discipline that you go through voluntarily, for your own development, physically, intellectually, morally, or aesthetically, serves to strengthen the will. If there is garrulousness in a person, and his speech is to be controlled, a vow of silence can be taken for a day or two, or even a week. By progressive courses, by regulated experience, whatever vice

or fault that may lie within a person in regard to the emotional nature, can be controlled. Every situation is different, but whatever suits a person in the present situation, whatever is suitable to one's capacity, one can follow. Reason and will must be developed in order to gain control over the emotions, and to guide them into the proper channel. In this way Vedanta declares that reason is the first thing necessary to control the emotions, then comes development of the will-power enabling one to control the emotions.

Reason does not function until you have been able to control your vices, because reason develops when the mind is pure to a certain extent. Virtue brightens intellect. Until you practise virtue, such as truthfulness, charity, sincerity, humility, your mind will not be purified and reason will not grow.

The lack of maturity (reason over emotions) is a major problem in child-raising, and it extends on into adulthood in many cases. A child develops his emotional nature before he develops his rational nature. He wants to enjoys things as much as possible by all his organs. He wants to eat well, see attractive things, meet with attractive persons, and so he develops his emotional nature before he has the power to discriminate between the good and the pleasant.

Anything attractive is good, this is a natural conclusion. Here Vedanta may differ from some modern psychologists. Children who have not yet attained maturity of judgment should be under the control of their superiors. For them the teachings of the great leaders and the teachings of the parents and elders are necessary. Otherwise, if discipline is left to children in the name of self-expression (you do anything you like) they will be ruined. They must be controlled.

Will this lead to self-repression? Will the child's mental nature be stunted? If the child has faith in the wisdom of the parents, and realizes that these counsels are for their own good, they will grow to adulthood, carrying the wisdom they learned as a child to help them over the difficult times. But if the children lose faith in the parents, there will be many difficulties on the way to adulthood.

If the parents want to control the children, they should, at the same time, lead an exemplary life, teaching the children as much by example as by precept. Simply giving precepts and counsels will not help the children very much. There is nothing wrong on the part of the parent in checking the child. What is wrong on the part of the parents is when they themselves do not follow the principles they want to inculcate in

the children. If the parents set the right examples before the children, there will be no difficulty, but if the children are controlled through fear, or under compulsion, there will be much difficulty. The children's faith in the parents will be destroyed.

If you want to develop reasoning power within children, the power to control their emotions, you cannot leave the course of life to them until they learn to control their emotions to a considerable degree. The mind must be purified greatly of the undesirable emotions such as anger, jealousy, hatred, fear, etc. This mind is purified by the practice of virtues such as sincerity, truthfulness, humility, kindness, charity, etc. It is necessary at the very beginning of life that children should know how to control themselves, and purify the mind and develop their reason.

Even though the reason develops, the fighting still continues because the roots of these emotions are not just on the surface of the mind, not just on the conscious plane, the roots are in the subconscious plane as well. Wrong emotions may not be strong enough to drive one to wrong deeds, but, still, they arise within one, greatly influencing the mental level, and sometimes expressing themselves at the most inopportune times. However, through reasoning power, a

person can manage his own affairs to a great extent. He will seek others' guidance when necessary. In this way he has to fight with the emotions, the roots of which are in the subconscious level.

This is a good time to pause and compare the difference between the Vedantic viewpoint concerning the conscious and subconscious mind with that of modern psychologists. Modern psychology has over-emphasized what is called the "unconscious" and "subconscious" levels. Modern psychologists believe that the subconscious is the creation of the conscious mind. It is true that the subconscious, your own creation, influences your conscious mind. But who created the subconscious? Anything you do with volition, with a "will", knowingly, deliberately, leaves an impression on the mind. You work with your hands, walk with the legs, or talk with the tongue, or you touch something, see something, smell something, every thing you do by any of the ten organs, leaves an indelible impression upon the mind. These impressions do not usually dwell on the conscious level, they go to the subconscious level. They create our disposition and our tendencies. Sometimes they are overpowered, sometimes they are attenuated, sometimes weakened, sometimes dormant. They

influence our conscious level from the subconscious level, but they may arise to the conscious level at any time, being stimulated by an external cause. They have their own way of coming to the conscious plane.

A person may have developed reason by controlling his emotions to a great extent through the guidance of others, still the battle for control continues. There are many stages of inner purification in this battle. For example, when you want to clean a house, in the beginning you may need to remove all kinds of junk and gross objects, then gradually you see that finer and finer impurities must be removed. Just as in house-cleaning, you gradually make the inner house completely clean, similarly, in the cleaning of the mind, you must go through many stages. When you fight with your own reason, your own understanding, voluntarily, it does not create any self-suppression; but under compulsion, through fear of society, etc., controlling the mind will be difficult.

There is one very vital point of difference between the Eastern and Western philosophy concerning self-suppression. In Western psychology the whole difficulty is a wrong conception of human personality. The key to the solution to human problems is the right conception of the human personality, but you must also have the

right conception of the self, the right conception of the mind, the right conception of the relation between the mind and the self. Everything is not an integral part of yourself. What are you, truly speaking? Are you just a physical being, or a psychophysical being? Are you an aggregate of the body, the organs, and the mind? In Western thought the mind has been aligned either with the body or identified with the Self. A clear distinct view of the human mind is hardly noticeable.

Vedanta speaks of the human mind as distinct, on the one hand, from the physical body, from the external organs, and from the real Self, also. How do you know that the mind is not just an annex to the body? Is it not a part and parcel of the body? Does not the mind arise from the body? No. Mind is something distinct from the body. You cannot identify the mind with the body. It has functions which do not belong to the body. One can sit quietly and not let the organs, such as seeing, hearing, smelling, touching, function at all. Still, one can think vigorously, feel, imagine, remember. How is this possible? Had the organs been responsible for thinking, feeling and imagining, or had the body been responsible, this would have been impossible when the body was inert. Yet one can think, imagine, even

though the eyes cannot see, the ears cannot hear, the taste and touch has been stopped. Each organ has a particular function, but besides these specific functions, there are other functions in the human personality, such as thinking, feeling, imagining, remembering and so forth. How is this possible when the body is quiet and the organs do not work? One can say that the brain performs these functions. But is the brain a part of the physical body? The answer is "yes". But if the brain is a part of the physical body, and if this thinking, feeling, imagining, and willing, belong to the brain, then these must be like physical processes. However, these functions have one speciality: consciousness is implicit in all of them. A living being can feel, but this table cannot feel. A human being has consciousness and can feel. But an inert thing, (this includes the brain, if it is part of the physical body) cannot think, feel, will, or imagine, because these are brain processes and cannot be characterized by consciousness. But these functions *are* characterized by consciousness which is implicit in all of them.

There is a distinct factor in the human personality which is responsible for the functions of thinking, feeling, willing, imagining, and that factor is the mind. The mind is, on the one hand, distinct from the body and the organs, and

on the other hand, it is distinct from the real Self. The Self is fundamentally the cognizer. For example, you cognize the conditions of the organs, and you cognize the condition of the mind, also. That cognizer is distinct from both the organs and the mind. You say, "I was happy yesterday, today I am unhappy." This means that there is a distinct observer within you which relates yesterday's state with today's state. It relates the preceding to the succeeding. There is a distinct observer which does not change with the changing experiences.

Vedanta declares there is a constant factor in the human personality, because, unless there is an unchanging observer, changes cannot be registered. There is an unchanging principle in the human personality distinct from the mind. This mind is distinct from the body and the organs. Then there is the real Self, distinct from the mind. The mind has an intermediary position between the real Self and the body and organs. This is the position one should understand first of all. The mind and organs belong to the not-self, or the apparent self. You have identified yourself with the psychophysical adjunct and say, "I am a body." You are then a mortal creature, bound, imperfect, and you claim to desire to realize God. Foolishness. Again, you

have a desire for eternal life. But how can one have a desire for eternal life if one is fundamentally mortal? There is a longing in the human heart which is very deep seated, for eternal life, for perfection, for complete freedom, for blessedness, because fundamentally you are an immortal spiritual entity.

THAT you are. Therefore, distinguish yourself from the not-self. Objectify the mind just as you objectify the body, and you control it. Similarly, you externalize the body because you know the body is not the real Self. It is just a dwelling house for the time being, like a cloak you have put on for the time being. If you externalize it, you distinguish yourself from the Self, and you have great power to control the body, including the organs. Do not identify yourself with anything which does not actually form a part of yourself. Don't commit that mistake.

Self-suppression, or self-repression can arise from this wrong understanding. You lose the power of controlling the mind because you identify yourself with the mind. You cannot visualize the fluctuations of the mind. You become completely submerged in the mental waves. How can you control them? This is the great secret that takes you above the problem of self-suppression and self-repression.

You just visualize your mind, objectify your mind. You can control it just as you control the body if you objectify it. For instance, you may say, "There is a wrong desire functioning within me, arising within me." As soon as you distinguish yourself from the thing to be controlled, you gain the power to control it. Your will power increases, your reason functions better. Vedanta reveals this secret: Unless you can distinguish yourself from this psychophysical constitution, you can never control the psychophysical effectively.

Vedanta declares that you can develop your power of reason. You must lift yourself by yourself. Your real self has become stuck in the body, the organs, and the mind. The idea that you are a fair-haired person, you are a man or a woman, tall or short, etc., is nonsense, truly speaking, from the highest standpoint. You lift yourself by yourself, by your buddhi; or by your higher self you raise your lower self. You may count this as the lower self as long as you identify yourself with this psychophysical adjunct; some call it the not-self. You control the lower self by the higher self. When you do distinguish yourself from the apparent self, at once you gain the power to control. It is said in the Bhagavad-gita: "A man should uplift himself by his own self. Let him

not weaken this self for this self is a friend of one's self and this self is the enemy of one's self." This psychophysical constitution, the lower self or the apparent self, is your friend if you control it; this psychophysical constitution is your enemy if you cannot control it. The Gita says further, "The self is a friend of the Self." That is, this psycho-physical constitution, the lower self, is a friend of the higher Self if you can control the lower self. The secret of controlling it is to distinguish between the apparent self and the real Self.

To the unconquered self, this self is inimical like an external soul. By controlling this apparent self, this psychophysical constitution with which you are wrongly identified through ignorance, you lift the real Self by the buddhi, the power of the discrimination. You lift the real Self, the knowing principle within you, from all that is known, including the mind. When your reasoning power develops you understand that there is the path of darkness, there is the path of light, there is the path of bondage, and there is the path of freedom. Your spiritual knowledge develops and you know that all temporal values in this relative order cannot give man real freedom and unmixed blessings. With the development of the reasoning power, when you

discriminate the real Self from the not-self, you know this Self does not actually belong to this ever-changing universe. This Self belongs to the Supreme Self, to God. You then consider seeking God or realizing your unity with God as the supreme goal in life.

In the Katha Upanishad there is a description of the human personality conceived of as a chariot, the body. There is a charioteer, the right understanding, the buddhi, which enables you to go in the right direction under all circumstances. The worldly experiences are the objects, or the paths, over which you are traversing. The organs are the horses, and they traverse the world of experience. These horses must be controlled. How? By the mind. Volition and emotion are the reins that serve to control the horses.

When you succeed in distinguishing the real Self, your reason grows rightly; with the help of reason you can control these reins, emotion and volition, which control the horses. In that case, they will traverse the right path, the path of light, the path of freedom and take you to the real Goal.

The wise call the Self, united with the body, the senses and the mind, the experiencer. The person functions as the experiencer of this manifold by his real Self being united with the psychophysical constitution. If the buddhi, being related

to a mind that is always restrained and always possesses discrimination, then the senses come under control, like the good horses of a charioteer. But if the buddhi (the reason), is related to a destructive mind, it loses its discrimination, and, therefore, always remains impure. Then the embodied soul never attains the goal but enters into the round of births and deaths. A man who has discrimination for his charioteer and holds the reins of the mind firmly, reaches the end of the road, and that is the supreme position of Vishnu, the abode of Vishnu, the Supreme God.

The secret of self-control is a clear conception of this human personality—that this mind is not the ruler, it is the ruled—you are the ruler; the mind is an instrument. When you take this position, and you objectify the mind with all its functions, you acquire the capacity of controlling the mind. If one cannot distinguish the real Self from the mind, there will be difficulty. It will be very difficult for one to control the senses as long as one is identified with the senses, difficult for one to control the body as long as one is identified with the body. You have to distinguish yourself from the body, the organs and the mind. This is the secret of self-control according to Vedanta.

You may or may not seek God, but still, to live in this world in the right way, and if you want to achieve great and good things in this world, you have to discipline the body, the organs, and the mind. You have to direct the energy of the body, the organs, and the mind towards the attainment of the goal. Even if you do not care for the highest goal as delineated in the Upanishads, still, you have to exercise self-control; and the more you can distinguish the real self from the body, the organs, and the mind, the greater is the power of self-control.

Emotions are not to be crushed, they are to be given a new direction. Self-control does not mean torturing yourself. If you have an emotion such as pride, the wrong use of it is bad; but if you have the pride of your spiritual heritage, that you belong to God, that pride will not be harmful. You will not do anything unbecoming. So an emotion such as pride can be used constructively. Instead of hating others, hate your own weaknesses and try to get rid of them. Even the undesirable emotions can be utilized for the attainment of your good. If you have jealousy within, let us say you are jealous of those who have more money, or a better position, instead of being jealous you emulate persons who have attained a higher ideal. In this way, jealousy

can turn into the power of emulation. These emotions can be transformed. You have not to crush fear even; you may be God-fearing. Thus it is seen that wrong emotions can be given a new direction. That is the meaning of self-control.

Swami Vivekananda has clearly pointed out that these emotions are very necessary in human life. We cannot do without them. There must be feeling within you. He says, "What we really want is head and heart combined. The heart is great, indeed. It is through the heart that come the great inspirations of life". Even Shankaracharya holds that if you want to realize the impersonal, absolute Being, though reason or intellect is very prevalent, unless there is devotion within your heart, you cannot attain the goal. Your heart must yearn for the goal, long for the goal. There is also the need of emotion in what is called the path of knowledge. "I would a hundred times have a greater heart and no brain than be all brains and no heart," says Swami Vivekananda. "Life is possible, progress is possible for him who has heart, but he who has no heart and only brains dies of dryness." A person who sees God only through reasoning, is just a research student. At the same time we know that he who is carried along by his heart alone, has to undergo many

ills. Emotions must be under the guidance of the will.

There is a story that a lame man met a blind man, and together they made a pact. The lame man proposed to the blind man, "Let me climb upon your shoulders and I shall direct you where to go. Together we can get along very well." One may compare reason with the man who had eyes but no legs, and emotion with the blind man who had legs but could not see. Emotion has tremendous motive power, but it is the combination of heart and head that we want. There is room for an infinite amount of feeling and, also, for an infinite amount of culture and reason. Let them be running together along parallel lines, each with the other. With this real understanding the will, volition and reason can be harmonized.

Chapter 9

Reincarnation and Heredity

The doctrine of reincarnation is strongly prevalent in Hinduism and Buddhism. There are subtle differences in the doctrines of reincarnation in the two religions. This article will deal with the subject from the Vedantic viewpoint.

The doctrine of reincarnation acknowledges heredity, the common biological principle that "like begets like". A human individual is invariably born of human parents, and also inherits some of the characters of both parents. This biological fact is acknowledged by Vedanta.

The modern view of heredity says, "Heredity in the last analysis is self-reproduction, the common property of all life, and the property that distinguishes the living from the non-living." This power of self-reproduction differentiates in one way the living from the non-living. The non-living does not have this power of reproduction.

The idea of heredity is further explained in this way: "New organisms closely resemble their parents. The off-spring of a bean plant are always beans and nothing else. The mating of two cats always produces cats and no other animal; furthermore, the mating of two Siamese cats always produces Siamese cats and not a different variety. Particular characteristics frequently appear in generation after generation, in man as well as in other animals. This resemblance of individuals to their progenitors is called heredity."

The fact of heredity is so familiar that its significance is frequently overlooked. The sperm cells and the parts of eggs effective in inheritance, the nuclei, are both exceedingly small. All the sperm that gave rise to the present population of the world, could be contained in a single drop of water, and another drop could hold all the egg-nuclei necessary.

Sperm is the reproductive cell of the male parent; an egg is the reproductive cell of the female parent. The living substance of the sperm and egg nuclei transmits all the characteristics which the new individual inherits from the parents. These nuclei are formed of a substance called the gene, which is the carrier of the characteristics of the parental characters. The gene

is contained in other physical or biophysical elements called chromosomes. The qualities themselves, colour, size, shape, and so forth, are not present in the germ cells, but something representing them, and capable of producing them in the new individual, is present. In man, the colour of hair, eyes, and skin, the size and shape of the body, and its parts, certain structural defects, resistance to various diseases, certain mental traits, capacities and defects, are all inherited and they must be represented in the gametes. The gametes are the sperms and the eggs, the reproductive cells of the male and parents. The latter contain factors which interact with each other and with the environment to produce the adult characteristics.

How does the individual start its life? Two factors are united: the reproductive cell of the male parent, called the sperm, and the reproductive cell of the female, called the ovum (egg cell). At copulation many of the reproductive sperms, and many are the eggs that are let loose. But only two, by chance, meet and produce another germ cell. This union is enough to produce an individual human being. Thus, the life of an individual begins as one germ cell which cannot be seen with the naked eye, and can be observed only by microscopic analysis. The germ cell

contains chromosomes, half of the number from the father and half from the mother. Within the chromosomes there is another biochemical element called the gene. The gene is constant and carries the hereditary character.

The germ cell is conceived as a biophysical element, and this element develops into a full-fledged man. This is possible because there cannot be anything in the effect that is not in the cause, says Vedanta. The tree must be immanent in the seed. An apple seed develops into an apple tree, a fig seed develops into a fig tree, the poppy seed develops into a poppy plant, because each tree or plant is immanent in the seed. Therefore, this germ seed (cell) from which the individual man develops must be the potential man. If one is to understand the germ cell, we must see man in his developed form. By no microscopic analysis can we find the tree in all its features in the seed. If we try to understand the tree through the seed, we shall make a serious mistake.

By no chemical or physical analysis can we find the mind in the germ cell unless we assume it; nor do we find the soul in the germ cell. If we want to understand the germ cell we must study man in his developed form, because this germ cell is the potential man. If we leave this position

and think just of the germ cell, we must say everything evolves out of the germ cell.

The germ cell is a biophysical element. We admit that man has organs, man has mind, man has the spiritual self, but all these come out of this biophysical element, that is, it is this biophysical element that gives rise to mind, that gives rise to the other organs, that gives rise to whatever consciousness there is in the human element. This position cannot be maintained, if we rightly understand the human personality.

In the human personality these are the prominent factors - the physical body, the mind, and the real Self. The real Self of man is so dominant and so central that it cannot be explained to have arisen from the physical. The mind, also, is so distinct from the physical body that it cannot be explained to have been derived from the physical body. We cannot agree with the biologists that all that is in man comes out of this germ cell. That man is actually immanent in the germ cell is apparent because the development takes place according to a plan, along with movements toward the attainment of an end; and a plan always implies consciousness.

One of the British philosophers, Wm. Hamilton has noted that a plan always indicated a planner. The planner is central in the germ cell,

and the planner must have consciousness, so, in the very center of the germ cell, there must be a central principle of consciousness that regulates the process of development of the germ cell.

From the very beginning we find that there is more than just physical or chemical elements in the germ cell, there are also psychical factors (mental characteristics) there. A central planner dominates the entire process of the development of the germ cell. We cannot say that the mind exists from the very beginning, but consciousness exists from the very beginning as the central fact of the germ cell. We cannot say mind and consciousness are a later development from the germ cell. This position does not hold water. We shall now try to explain man as we see him in his developed state; how far his mind and how far his self are derived from the physical body.

There is one central point in man, and that is the ego, the "I am." "I live in this house, I am the master of the situation, I eat, I drink, I sleep, I suffer, I enjoy, etc." This "I" is the nucleus of all the functions of the organs, and of all the functions of the mind. It is the experiencer, and also functions as the doer. Though apparently changing, it is actually changeless. It is this changeless experiencer, which is of the nature of pure consciousness, associated with functions of the

organs and the mind, that appears to change. The ego has only the appearance of the real self. You say, "Yesterday I was happy. Today I am miserable." That means that you exist behind your happiness and your misery. That "I" is neither miserable nor happy, it is beyond both, and is the witness, the observer of your mental happiness, and your mental suffering. That which is apart from all physical and mental conditions is the real Self, unchanging, and of the nature of consciousness.

That Self, which is the central fact, and which coordinates all the physical and psychical elements into a coherent whole, is the master in this psychophysical organism, and is of the nature of consciousness. *That* sees through the eyes, *that* speaks through the mouth, *that* works through the *hands*, *that walks* through the legs, *that* is one, which appears to be changing, due to the changing conditions of the body and the mind. There is one central fact that dominates the entire system, experiencing the waking state, the dream state, and the deep sleep state. The witness of all the changing conditions does not participate in those changing conditions. There is one central point that dominates the body when the body is inert; *that* knows, *that* still reigns during sleep and dream. When the body does

not function *that* is still there, experiencing dream and deep sleep, yet never sleeps, because it is the watcher of sleep, the sentinel that guards the psychophysical organism during sleep. *That* has no sleep, it is ever awake, because it is of the nature of consciousness. *That* is the real Self. It is awake even when the body is almost dead. It is ever awake; *that* cannot be derived from the body. The body is functioning because of its presence. The moment the Self leaves the body, the body is frozen.

There is one Self, of the nature of consciousness, the ruling principle that cannot be derived from the body. This has been very well pointed out by one of the philosophers of India, the originator of the Samkhya system, Kapila. "Because of the presence of the experiencer, the body, the seat of experience, develops. From the moment of conception it is there, otherwise, decomposition would result. This central fact is regulating the entire process of development. It cannot be derived from the physical body.

It is very often explained that mind also comes from the body. If heredity explained fully the birth of a human being and its development by environment, then reincarnation would have no place. But, there is a great deal of gap between the development of the germ cell and

the full-fledged man. Can the mind derive from the body? Is it part and parcel of the body? Or is it distinct from the body, or derived from the body? Vedanta says that the mind is a distinct principle from the very beginning. Just as the Self is a distinct principle, the mind, also, is a distinct principle.

For instance, there is the knower. You are seated here, your eyes are open, and you are watching me, still, you may not see me. Why? Your earholes are open, but you do not hear me. You, the experiencer, the knower, are here, still, you are not aware of the presence of any other person. Why? Because there is a third factor distinct from the body, distinct from the organs, distinct from the self. We say we were "absent-minded." There is another factor distinct from the body, from the organs, and from the self, because of which you do not hear me, but you are listening, apparently, you are seeing me, apparently.

Each of the organs has a particular function: the eyes can see only; the ears can hear only; the palate can taste only; the organs of touch can touch only; the nostrils can smell only. There is another organ in the human personality that is responsible for such functions as feeling, willing, imagining, remembering. You sit quietly, let none

of the organs function; let not the hands move, the legs move, the tongue move, close all the organs tightly. Still, you can vigorously think, feel, imagine, remember. Why? Because there is another instrument that is responsible for all these functions that cannot be identified with the body or the organs. You cannot explain all these functions of thinking, feeling, and willing, as brain processes. The brain is evidently part and parcel of the physical body. All its processes are bound to be physical and mechanical because it is part of the physical body, but all these functions have consciousness implicit in them.

This mind, while it is responsible for external perception, because it must be joined with the sense organ for perception, is solely responsible for internal perception, introspection. How do you know you have fear, anger, hatred, jealousy, pride, or love? Can you see these emotions with your eyes, or taste them, or touch them. You see these workings of the mind by introspection, without which these emotions cannot be proven. If someone asks you, "Do you love your husband?" You may answer, "Oh yes, I love him so much." "How do you know that you love him?" "I kiss him, I speak sweet words to him, I give him presents, I cook for him." You can do all these things without loving your husband,

and even while you know you don't love him. Love is something that cannot be identified with the physical expressions. How do you know that you love or do not love? Just by introspection. And if you husband loves you or not, that is also by introspection.

Suppose your husband speaks sweet words to you, and gives you presents, perhaps a diamond necklace. For the moment you feel very happy, still, you may think, "He does all this for me, yet I feel that he doesn't really love me. I don't relish his presence as I used to." The mind says that in spite of all these physical expressions of love, there is no love there. The mind judges both the absence and the presence of love. Love cannot be perceived by the organs, but it can be known by introspection. One of the great Vedic teachers points out, "The sense organs perceive the objects, but the mind judges the perception." For instance, you see a piece of cake. From past experience you know that it is good, even so, you come to the conclusion that it is not wholesome. The organs give the report that it is very agreeable, but the mind gives the report that it is not wholesome, so you decide not to eat it. The organs give one kind of report, but there is another factor in the human personality that gives a different report. That which gives a different

report must be different from the organs. That is the mind.

We cannot identify mind with the physical body; we cannot say that the mind is derived from the physical processes. There is the Self, distinct from the mind as its observer. There is a Self, distinct from the body as an observer. There is a Self, distinct from the organs as the observer of all the functions of the organs. This, we cannot say is derived from the body. It is true that the body preconditions and affects the mind. The mental conditions affect the body, still, the dominating factor is the mind. If the body gets sick, the mind can heal the body; but if the mind becomes sick, the body cannot heal the mind, because there is some difference in their relative position. It is far better to be sick physically than to be sick mentally.

We find that by the study of man in his developed state there is the real Self, the dominating factor which manifests the organism, and there is a mind. We cannot say that in the beginning of the individual's life there are only physical elements or, only bio-chemical elements and everything develops from the mind. Vedanta says *no*. From the very beginning the mind, the entire mind, lies there in potential form. It is the view expressed by all the philosophers in India that

there cannot be evolution without involution. The seed evolves into a tree, because the tree is involved in the seed. Modern biologists emphasize evolution but do not think of involution. In our opinion both should be combined.

Where does this man in the germ cell come from? If we say the seed is the involved man, then, apparently, the germ cell is a biophysical element. Our investigation shows, however, that it is not merely a bio-physical element. It has a mind and a soul from the very beginning. Where do the soul and the mind come from.

The germ cell is produced by the union of the reproductive cell of the father and the reproductive cell of the mother. The character of this cell is to all appearances a bio-physical something. If mind be distinct from the body, then can these physical elements transmit the mental characteristics? Mental characteristics must inhere in the mind and physical characteristics must inhere in the physical body. If we hold that some physical elements come to the Mother's body, can these physical elements bring mental characteristics? Not unless you hold that parts of the father's mind also come into the mother's body with the physical elements; but the mind maintains a man's (or a woman's) individuality, and mind cannot be partitioned. It is too subtle and

homogeneous in its constitution, yet it has many factors in it. If we hold that at the conception of each child the parents' minds come into the child along with the genes, then shall we say that with the birth of each child both the parents should lose a little portion of their minds. So far as our experience goes, the parents do not seem to lose any of their mental powers. So where does the mind come from? We cannot uphold the assumption that parts of the mind of the parents are transmitted into the child with the germ cell. Though biology particularly emphasizes the transmission of the physical characteristics, it does not object to the transmission of the mental characteristics of the parents, because it does not make any clear differentiation between the body and the mind. From the Vedantic viewpoint these are both distinct. If there is mind in the germ cell, where does it come from? It if does not come from the parents, it must come from some other source. There is another factor involved, and that is the real Self, the observer, the knower, the central principle in every individual. Where does this Self come from? The Self is changeless and cannot be broken. It is birthless, growthless, decayless, deathless. It is impossible to think that a portion of the father's Self would be cut off and admitted into the child. We have to find some

source for the presence of the mind and the Self in the germ cell. Just as we cannot explain how the tree is involved in the seed, similarly, we cannot explain how the entire man is involved in the germ cell. The Vedantic view is that the subtle body comes to the parents body, and through that particular sperm, that reproductive cell, it goes into the mother's body, unites with the ovum, thus both mother and father contribute to the physical body of the child.

There is no question about this, but apart from the physical characteristics, there are characteristics which are in potential form—just their potencies—and besides this there is the mind and the soul which do not belong to the father or the mother. The individual comes from elsewhere. To understand all this, we need to look into the Vedantic view of death.

When a person dies he leaves just the physical body, but his mind and his soul go out of the body, however, the soul does not go out in all its nakedness. All the impressions that have been gathered from good and bad deeds, weaknesses or excellences, will go with him. He can take nothing of this physical body with him, nothing of this world. Conversely, he can get rid of nothing of this mind. The entire mind with the impressions that have been stored will go with him.

Where these impressions will lead him, will determine the course of the soul's journey after death. At that time a very subtle physical vesture is formed. This physical vesture serves as the potency for securing the future body of the child, and when it's potencies develop to a certain extent, it seeks the body that is necessary for giving expression or fructification of its inner nature. In course of time it comes to the parent (the soul with this mind, plus all its characteristics) and enters the body through food, generally; then it must get into that particular sperm that is responsible for creating the germ cell.

The real impetus comes from the father. The mother's egg or ovum serves as the soil or basis or field. The sperm carrying the real individual, joins with the mother's ovum, and the two together become another germ cell to which the father and the mother contribute, and which carries some physical characteristic of both parents.

In the writer's view the biological explanation of the development of the germ cell into a man does not meet all the difficulties, so there is great scope for the doctrine of reincarnation. Without this doctrine the actual development of an individual from child to the full-fledged man cannot be explained.

The theory of reincarnation upholds the view of heredity, because the progeny must come from parents of the same species; the offspring belongs to the same species as the parent. Development takes place not just because of the germ cell, but it is an interaction of the environment and the germ cell. The two together are responsible for the development of the individual.

Swami Vivekananda points out that with evolution there must be involution. "Every evolution is preceded by an involution. The seed is the father of the tree, but another tree was itself—the father of the seed. The seed is the fine form out of which the big tree comes, another tree was the form which is involved in that seed. The whole of this universe was present in the cosmic fine universe. The little cell, which later becomes the man, was simply the involved man, and becomes evolved as a man. If this is clear we have no quarrel with the evolutionists, for we see that if they admit this step, instead of their destroying religion, they will be the greatest supporters of it... Evolution and involution are going on throughout the whole of nature. The whole series of evolution beginning with the lowest manifestation of life and reaching up to the highest, the most perfect man, must have been the evolution of something else."

Modern biology is consistent with the Vedantic thought in this respect, that Vedanta holds the life principle as something distinct from the material elements. There was a theory that living things came out of non-living matter by spontaneous generation. Beginning with the twentieth century, the theory of abiogenesis had been refuted. Most biologists admit that the living come from the living by the process of reproduction. Reproduction may be sexual or asexual among the plants and animals. We may hold to the view that the life principle is distinct, yet, we cannot trace it from matter. Still, there are biologists who hold the mechanical view that in the very beginning there was only matter in the universe. When matter was ready for living organism then life came out of that matter. If this view is held, it means that we are going back to the theory of abiogenesis. We say that if you hold that life comes out of matter, then you must at the same time hold that life must be eminent in matter. Something cannot come out of nothing. If you want butter you require milk. You cannot get butter out of water.

There is a relation between cause and effect which you cannot deny. You cannot make a pot out of sand, but you can make a pot out of clay. There is some difference. If we persue this rule

that the effect is the manifestation of its potential form in the cause, then we have to say that in the germ cell the real man is in potential form, and this real man cannot be explained to have been transmitted by either of the parents. Some aspects of the man are transmitted, but not the man as whole.

Chapter 10

The Doctrine of Karma

Usually this Sanskrit word "karma" is translated as meaning "work", or "action", or "deed", but karma has a connotation which none of these words have. Karma includes not only our actions performed by this physical body and the organs, it also includes our thoughts as well as our words. You see, youhear, you give, you take, you walk, all these are different forms of karma. It does not include, however, what we call the automatic and reflex actions. You are breathing, and at the same time you are digesting your breakfast and blinking your eyes. These are automatic or reflex actions and are not to be included under karma.

Karma means conscious, deliberate action. It is not mechanical action. Human beings cannot be considered just a self-moving machine. This is why the human life is the particular sphere of karma. There is no karma in the sub-human plane, because animals behave instinctively. Trees and plants are living, they may feel also.

Animals live, feel, and perceive also, but human beings live, feel, perceive and also think. The human mind has the capacity to discriminate between the apparent and the false, between the finite and the infinite, between the relative and the absolute. Because of this power of thinking, man has freedom of choice, of action.

Human life has the special privilege of being able to distinguish between right or wrong, as well as the power to choose alternative choices. The very idea of the doctrine of karma is based on the recognition of the fact that man has a certain freedom of will, however limited it may be.

Whatever you do consciously, deliberatively, produces a two-fold result. One result is visible and immediate, the other is invisible and remote. For example, you feed a hungry person. That person is satisfied, his hunger is appeased, and you also find satisfaction. This is the immediate effect and the visible proof. Apart from this, there is another effect which leaves an impression on your mind. This impression will have a tendency to create a charitable disposition within you. Not only that, this impression will be a moral force which will lead you to some agreeable situation in the future.

It is the conscious, deliberate action that leaves a particularly indelible impression on

the mind. Mechanical action may produce some immediate result, but it does not leave any impression which can fructify in the future to create a favourable or unfavourable situation.

Whatever we do consciously, deliberately, produces not only an immediate result, but also lies within us in a very subtle form as a moral force. These impressions we are constantly storing within us. They become the sources of our memories; they determine our likes and dislikes; they determine even our mental powers. It is very important that we know what we are achieving by our conscious, deliberate actions.

These forces lie within us, producing certain results. There are many (perhaps most) of these that lie within us as merit or demerit, and will not fructify in this life. "As we sow, so shall we reap." These impressions must produce results some time or other. Time cannot annul them; distance cannot avert them. If you do something wrong, it will make some impression that will form demerit, and it will pursue you wherever you go, even if it is not here on this earth. Death cannot eliminate it, time cannot annul it, distance cannot avert it. Some time or other it will fructify. In this way we are storing merits and demerits within us, subtle impressions, but

very forceful, and these will create our future situation, here or elsewhere.

According to this doctrine of karma, man has to come back to this plane of existence. This plane is particularly the field of action. Man has the power to think; has the freedom of choice; has the freedom of action; has the freedom of decision. This is the special privilege of the human mind, and because of this, man has the greatest possibility of moral and spiritual development.

A person may go to some higher plane to enjoy the fruits of his good deeds, his meritorious deeds. Some may work hard in order to go to a place where there is only enjoyment, happiness — call it a paradise. It is not exactly the kingdom of God in the strict sense. They go there for sense fulfilment. There will be no karma there, just a place where you exhaust your acquired merits. Just as you go to a place of vacation with your money earned here, locally, there you have a good time, you relax and spend your money. When your money is exhausted, you come back to your place of work.

If a person has acquired many demerits, he may have to go to some dark region of suffering. There also, he will gain no new acquisition. He will simply exhaust through punishment

or through suffering, those demerits that had accumulated within him. He will still have to come back to this human plane for new acquisitions.

Men cannot live permanently in the penitentiary. There is no gain there. It is a distinctive mark of this human life that this is the plane of action. Whether you want prosperity or enjoyment, whether you want intellectual recognition or whether you want fame and glory on this earth, or whether you want beatitude in the Kingdom of God, you have to earn it here on this human plane. You do not get this opportunity elsewhere. This is the plane of action, conscious deliberate action. In the subhuman plane there is no moral life. There may be creatures much more innocent than human beings, still, they cannot be counted as moral beings.

Through karma we accumulate impressions which can be counted as merits and demerits, moral forces that create future situations for us. Some of those impressions have fructified and have created this present situation. Everyone is born with a particular psychophysical system. Everyone is born in a certain situation, and everyone will go through certain experiences. Each person will live for a certain period of time. It is not completely fixed but in a general way

it is determined. You cannot completely make or unmake this physical body you have acquired.

Why these differences? Karma, or the law of karma, is the best explanation of the differences, as well as many other anomalies of life. Everyone is born with certain tendencies, capacities, and aptitudes. Heredity does not explain this, but the law of karma does. It does not make God, or some unknown fate responsible for this. It makes you responsible for this. You are what you struggle for. Your present situation has been determined by your past actions, and your future will be determined by your present actions.

Not all the impressions we have stored for our future existence have fructified in this particular life. A certain part of this has fructified, but there is a great deal of it left in store which lies dormant within us. This is called in Sanskrit *Sanchita-karma*, karma in store. When a part of that karma has fructified, that is called *Prarabda-karma*, that which has started producing its result. As we are reaping the fruits of our past actions, we are doing new actions. Karma does not mean that your actions are completely predetermined, or your mental and physical movements are completely determined by your past actions.

Past actions have created certain conditions for you. You are working under those conditions. Naturally, you will have certain limitations. For example, you have sufficient strength to carry a load, which you have on your back. With that load on your back, you cannot move as freely as you can without it. Still, you have a certain freedom of action, and you can modify your conditions to a great extent. You can improve your physical health as well as your mental nature, and thereby greatly alleviate the effect of past actions.

You may have a physical handicap, but in spite of that you can make some progress in this life. You need not succumb to that physical handicap. You have to accept the situation because it is your own creation. You have some kind of resignation to your existence, but at the same time you must be hopeful of your future, because it was you who created the situation. You still have the power to undo what you have done. You cannot undo it completely, but you can modify the conditions. This present life is, actually, a combination of the results of past actions as well as our present deeds.

These actions we perform in this present life are called *kriyamana-karma*, the work that is presently being done. These actions are, in turn,

producing impressions within us. As long as a person cannot realize the real nature of the Self, and cannot realize the unity of the Self with the Divine Being, he will be in the relative plane and he will be bound by the law of karma.

The law of karma is a phase of the universal law of cause and effect. This universal law of cause and effect applied to human existence is the law of karma. The whole world is governed by the law of cause and effect. A cause produces an appropriate effect and that effect becomes the cause of another corresponding effect. In this way the whole universe is bound by the law of cause and effect.

This law of cause and effect is prevailing in human life where it has taken the form of moral life. It does not function mechanically, nor does it function blindly. If you bring some butter near a fire, the butter melts mechanically. Human beings are rewarded or punished, or they reap the fruits of their good or bad actions under this law, and this law cannot function unless it has moral sense. You cannot adjudge punishment or reward anyone unless you have moral sense. So this law of cause and effect functioning in the human plane has taken the form of a moral law. Moral law needs a judge who can exercise his power of distinguishing between the just and the unjust, between right and wrong.

This law of karma is quite consistent with the theistic idea, that is, in the belief in God. This law of karma, being the moral law, needs a moral being to superintend it. It is actually the decree of the Divine Being. It does not mean some blind mechanical law is functioning; that you are doing something wrong and as a result of this, you are reaping some kind of punishment, some undesired fruit. Rather, it is a moral law which can be considered as a decree of the Divine Being.

This law of karma binds, evidently, human beings. Then how can one attain freedom from this round of birth, growth, decay, death, and rebirth? If you do something wrong, in course of time it will fructify and create an unfavourable situation for you. And if you do something right, it will create a favourable situation for you. Yet, even a favourable situation in this relative plane is a bondage. Just as want binds you, plenty also binds you. Just as ugliness binds you, beauty also binds you. Just as evil binds you, good also binds you, because it keeps you in the plane of duality.

You cannot get out of duality through the practice of kindness, because you yourself accept a situation where misery is a permanent element. If kindness be your ultimate ideal, that means

you want misery to exist somewhere so that you can be kind. The moment you make moral principle the ultimate ideal of your life, you accept a dualist's position. You accept that misery should be there; but you cannot get out of the evil side of life through the practice of morality. It cannot satisfy your highest aspiration for absolute good, absolute joy, absolute light. It cannot permanently solve the problem of good and evil. The law of karma keeps you on the plane of duality. You can give up wrong deeds by exercising your moral sense as much as possible. You can perform virtuous deeds, and in consequence of the merits gathered through these virtuous deeds, you will be in a very favourable situation. You will be able to do more virtuous deeds here or elsewhere; but you will not attain that complete freedom that absolute good can give.

You can, at best, give up wrong deeds as far as possible; but, here also, right or wrong, good or evil, are so closely associated that it is almost impossible to become wholly good or wholly bad. Karma, therefore, cannot lead you to complete freedom.

Yet, there is a way out. Impressions are created as long as you hold to selfishness, or to this ego. If you do anything unselfishly as a free person, without expecting any result, these

impressions will not be created within you. You will be a free person. Work as much as you can in this world, free from all selfishness. You will be free right now, and you will also be free in the future. The law of karma cannot touch you. So the only way to get out of the bondage of karma is by being unselfish, not holding to this ego.

When a person surrenders this ego to God he will not think of himself as "I am the doer," "I am the master." He knows that God is the sole master, and that he is the motive power, He is the unmoved mover of everything. He thinks of himself as just a channel, a vehicle of God's power and God's knowledge. He works in this world surrendering all his deeds to the Lord. Whatever he may do will be right because he cannot deviate from the moral path. Unselfishness will not make a person evil. People do not do wrong things unselfishly. It is because of selfishness that thy do wrong things. When a person's mind is free from selfishness, naturally, he will do good deeds. He will work in this world, and that work cannot create any bondage for him. But as long as he holds to selfishness, to this ego, even good deeds will bind him.

Just as karma binds us, it can also lead us to freedom. Work in this world, the law of karma says, but remember if you do it with a selfish

motive, in expectation of return, that work will react on you. So the fruit of karma means the reaction of your own work. Karma does not react on a person who does not expect any return from his own work.

You work as a free person, and the impressions that you already have within you are worked out. You do not accumulate any new karma, any new impressions. However, to be rid of the existing karma, you have to work in this world. Just by giving up work you cannot be free of the law of karma, because the impressions will still be there. If you want to work out or exhaust these impressions, you will have to work, but without motive. Work, surrendering yourself to the Lord. You may have just one motive, motive of love of God, devotion to God, complete freedom to be united with God.

Just as karma creates a bondage when done with the desire for results; when done without selfishness, without an egotistic attitude, it leads to freedom. Through karma a person can be bound; and through karma a person attains freedom. Outwardly, you are working the same, but inwardly your attitude has completely changed.

We find that the law of karma is based on the recognition of the fact that man is not just

an automaton, or a bundle of instincts. He has freedom of will; he has the power of decision, and also the power to follow his decision. Karma is based on the acceptance of man's freedom, however limited that freedom may be. Whether he can use the freedom rightly or wrongly, that is a different question. But he does have the freedom. You may have some power, but you may not have another power to use that power rightly. You are responsible for your own present situation, favourable or unfavourable, and in spite of your handicaps you can make progress in this life.

Karma functions generally in two distinct ways. It creates tendencies for certain activities. Through education, through right associations, you can change these tendencies. You have the power. This activity will lead you to certain new experiences that are a little difficult to get rid of. For instance, a person loses a fortune through no fault of his own. This world is not determined simply by our own activities, there are many other forces at play. There are certain experiences we go through because of past actions which we cannot alter very much by our activities. But the tendencies that Karma created toward our activities, the tendencies in the mind, can be greatly changed by our education and good association. Even so, we cannot always avoid bad experiences.

A person can change his attitude completely towards life. Suppose he has some physical disability, he can always be found fretting over it; or he may resign himself to it, and meet the situation with a hopeful attitude for the future. Thus, he finds a certain amount of freedom in spite of his disabilities. A person should be judged not by his physical disabilities, not by poverty to which he may be born, but rather by the attitude with which he lives in this world. That is one of the great teachings of the doctrine of karma.

You may judge a person because he has lost one eye (bad karma). But you should not judge him by this. The question is: What is his attitude at the present time? Is he sinful or saintly, wise or unwise? Karma says: Whatever your situation in life is, you make the best of it, physically and mentally. You have freedom to do both to a great extent.

Karma makes you responsible for your whole situation. It does not lay the blame on God, or some uncertain fate, or on the parents. There is no accidentalism according to the law of karma, or predestination, or fatalism. The law of karma acknowledges that man is not just a physical being, or a psychophysical being. He has the immortal spirit within him. When he dies, that does not mean the end of his existence. He has to

carry his karma with him. But he has to leave the physical shell of the body; nothing can he take with him. But nothing he has acquired can he leave behind. It follows him, merit or demerit, whatever talents he may have, weaknesses or strengths, whatever powers he may have acquired, all the mental contents, all the psychological contents, these all depart with him as his only equipage, which, in turn will determine his future course.

It is acknowledged that there is something in man that is immortal, otherwise, the law of karma cannot function. This one life is too limited for it. As long as he submits to this ego-consciousness he will be in bondage. Good will produce good results; bad will produce bad. Good and bad, both, will be the cause of bondage on the relative plane. When he tries to get out of this ego-consciousness, when he realizes his immortal spiritual Self and its essential oneness with the Supreme Being, and tries to realize that, and submits to that, the way to freedom becomes open.

The law of karma is not inconsistent with the idea of helping others. Sometimes people say, "Well, here is a man suffering because of his karma. Why should I help him? I am not going to interfere with God's law or with his karma." That is a wrong attitude. Karma inevitably

produces its results, no doubt, but you can mitigate things by your own efforts.

There is another important point to consider in this connection, that a person has the seeds of karma. The seeds do not petrify, they are always there. They do not rot. These seeds only need certain favourable conditions to fructify. You may have some seeds of a certain plant; these seeds will grow only when they find some favourable situation such as the right kind of soil, the right amount of moisture, the right amount of heat, etc., then they can fructify. In the case of these physical plants, the seeds generally rot, but the seeds of karma do not so easily rot, that is the vital difference. These seeds of karma will be held inside, and they will not fructify until they find a favourable condition.

There may be stored actions in a person, but they may not find any suitable chance to fructify. These actions others may help to fructify. A person is suffering, and through my help his suffering may be greatly mitigated. If I can mitigate my sufferings, why can I not mitigate others' sufferings? These sufferings can be mitigated through right living, through prayer to God, through charitable deeds.

A person is living in a house, and somebody sets fire to the house. The house is burned

down. The arsonist says, "Well, it was his karma to lose his house by fire, so I have not done anything wrong." There must have been some unfavourable karma to account for it, but the arsonist created the situation for the fructification of that karma. A person may be lying in his house with the windows and doors open inadvertently; a robber comes in and steals his property. The robber could not have come in if he was awake, or if he had closed the doors and windows before he went to bed. This much is karma; that he left the doors and windows open before he went to bed. But the coming of the robber into the house and stealing some of his property, that is the robber's karma.

A person may have certain tendencies, or some wrong forces within him because of which he will suffer, but others can also activate this karma. This law of karma does not mean that we cannot do any harm to others, that everybody suffers because of his karma, and everybody, also enjoys because of his karma. Into his karma of good and evil, others' activities are intertwined and are working simultaneously. When we do harm to a person, we may be inadvertently helping his work to fructify, or if any work is being fructified, we can reduce the adverse effects of those actions. So this law of karma

is not inconsistent with the idea of helping others.

The idea of karma also tells you that it is true, you are bound, but through work you can gain freedom. Also, this idea of karma acknowledges the grace of God. But if we are bound by a law that says good produces good results, and evil produces evil results, where is the scope for God's grace?

You are bound by the law of karma as long as you hold to your ego. This ego says such things as, "I am the master in this world, I can make and unmake things. If there is a God let him stay there. I can take care of myself." As long as a person holds to this kind of attitude, he is in the sphere of law, and the law takes care of such a person. But when he realizes the limitations of his individual ego, and surrenders himself to God, then he knows that it is by attaining unity with the Supreme Being, that a person can be free, and that there is no other way to freedom. Then God's Grace functions. His bondage to karma is, to a great extent, removed.

If a person completely surrenders himself to God, then he can be immediately freed. But it is not so easy to surrender oneself to God. This is why we repeatedly pray, "Oh, Lord, I am thine, I am thine," but because our surrender is very

much measured, so God's Grace also comes in a measured quantity. However, God's Grace is ready to descend on us in full measure if we but give it a chance.

So long as a person holds to this ego, he will be bound by the law of karma. But, when he tries to surrender this ego to God, gradually, this law of karma recedes and the Grace of God descends upon his life and helps him to obtain freedom.

In summary, this law of karma is recognized by the fact that man has freedom of will, and this law of karma makes a person responsible for his conditions in life, good or evil. This law of karma recognizes that man has an immortal nature, and though karma binds him, it can also lead him to complete freedom. This law is not a blind law, it is a decree of the Divine Providence and is consistent with the idea of God's Grace.

CHAPTER 11

Approach to God through Symbol

Symbols have been used in nearly all religions for the purpose of reaching God. In Hinduism, the symbol "Om" is the most comprehensive of the Vedic symbols. It is an audible symbol consisting of three letters: A, U, M. We find the symbol of Zoroastrianism represented by a cauldron of fire. It symbolizes the perpetual light of the spirit. The Confucian symbol is represented by calligraphy used on the Confucian temple. Then there is the Christian symbol of Christ on the cross, or the cross without the body of Christ. The symbol of Mohammedanism is calligraphic writing in Arabic, "God is One, and Mohammed is his prophet."

The symbol of Judaism is a candelabra, or the menorah with seven candles burning. The symbol of Taoism is a circle. In it are two shapes of different colours, each containing a dark

spot, or a contrasting spot in each shape. The symbol of Buddhism is the wheel, representing the law of Dharma.

The use of symbols is not confined to religion. The application of symbol is to be found in the whole life of man. The widest application of symbol is the use of language. Every word is symbolic. The word "symbol" in a wide sense means a visible sign of something invisible, something intangible. Every word is actually a symbol of some inner idea. Man feels the necessity of comprehending the abstract through something concrete. Every word is really a representation of something concrete, or abstract, or both.

When we use the word, "tree", it does not mean the concrete object, "tree." It means the concept, "tree." Because of that the word "tree" is applicable not to any particular tree, but to trees, in general.

The word "man" is also representative of the concept "man". It is applicable to all human beings. If it represented only some concrete object with definite form, it could not be applied to all objects of that same class. Every word actually represents the concept, whether it represents any action, or whether it represents any entity, it always means the concept. This is the widest

application. (This application we find in art as well.)

Man feels the necessity of comprehending the abstract through the concrete. The concrete makes the abstract clear to him. Man feels an urge to express his inner thoughts and feelings in realistic terms. Art is born particularly of this urge. You cannot contain your thoughts and feelings if they are very strong; you feel a tendency to give expression to them. The fine arts originate from this natural human tendency to give expression to inner thoughts and feelings. Architecture, sculpture, painting, music, poetry, etc., are the expressions of that inner urge within man.

The relation between the word and the concept is natural. It is not something arbitrary, or conventional. We can say that there are, of course, technical terms which can be said to be conventional. I am not speaking of the technical terms; but what naturally exists in the human field cannot be said to be artificial or arbitrary. It is natural. Just as a person may have seven children, yet, the relationship with each child is natural. Similarly, the "word" may have many meanings, but the relationship with each word is natural. Human language has not originated from convention.

In religion there has been the greatest necessity of the use of symbols, because religion deals with the subtlest of realities, the finest of all existences, that is, the existence that permeates everything, but which is not permeated by anything else. Absolute Consciousness is the goal of religion.

Man feels the necessity of apprehending abstract ideas in concrete forms. It is the concrete that makes the abstract more vivid and real to him; he has a tendency to represent the supersensible in terms of the sensible. He also finds satisfaction in giving orderly expression to his conceptions, thoughts, and sentiments. These urges have been the creative force of fine art. It is the function of art to give concrete shapes to the inner ideas and ideals. All genuine works of art are symbolic.

Art is not just representative; it is more-or-less interpretative. In presenting a landscape a painter does not give just a copy of nature but gives his own ideas of that particular phase of nature. Art is, truly speaking, interpretative or idealistic rather than realistic or representative.

As man learns mostly through the eyes and ears, he needs two distinct kinds of symbols, visual and audible. So art has two main forms of symbolic expression—architecture, sculpture,

painting, on the one hand and music and poetry on the other. Religion deals primarily with the supersensible truths, therefore, in the religious life of man there has been the imperative need of symbols, both visisble and audible. In every religion there are symbolic presentations of spiritual truths. In its efforts to comprehend Supreme Reality, to worship God with devotion and joy, to feel His presence vividly and intimately, the religious spirit of man has manifested itself in all kinds of art. Not all the fine arts have been prevelant in every religion.

For instance, in Islam iconography and music seem to have no place. In Christianity, dancing has not grown as an expression of religious sentiment. In Hinduism, however, all the avenues of art have been sought in approaching God. In the development of art, religion has played a distinctive role. Perhaps all the fine arts have had their origin in religion. Of the two main branches of iconography, sculpture and painting, the former has been prominent in Hinduism and Buddhism, and the latter, painting, in Christianity.

Both have deeply influenced the religious lives of the people. Among the religious symbols, the likenesses of God-men are particularly impressive and inspiring. The great spiritual

leaders who are worshipped as Divine Incarnations, messengers, or prophets, are the highest manifestations of God in human form. They make God real for us. We may conceive of God by speculative reason, or by the study of books, yet, we cannot be free from doubts as to His existence until we know the God-like personages. We can understand Divine Purity, Divine Love, Divine Power, Divine Wisdom, Divine Joy, only through them; they represent God to us better than any celestial being. We cannot adore God but through them. Their images serve as natural symbols in the worship of the Divinity. They are most helpful to spiritual aspirants, especially in the early stage of development.

These forms of God-men have been used mostly in Hinduism. There are paintings, or photographs, used in other religions, but in Hinduism images have been used as well. Three-dimensional iconography has been used abundantly in Hinduism. Architecture is used in Islam, but not sculpture. Now, how do these images lead to the realization of God?

An image is a concrete thing. It is not the image that is worshipped, but it is the Divine Presence in the image, or, the image as the embodiment of Divinity. The worshipper knows this very well. Before the worship of the image

is begun, there are some processes by which the image becomes instinct with Divinity. The worshipper does not accept the image as just a material form, he looks upon the image as the very embodiment of Divine Purity, Divine Wisdom, Divine Love, Divine Freedom, Divine Joy. In thinking of the image, he actually thinks of God. As Sri Ramakrishna used to say with regard to the image of Kali, "It is not a clay image, a stone image, but actually it is the very embodiment of Divine Consciousness." In this way the worshipper approaches the image.

When you see the photograph of a great man, you are inspired because you do not see the photograph as just a piece of paper with some figure on it, you see it as the representation of the principle for which that person stood. When you accept the image and express your devotion to the image, you can carry on various kinds of worship such as physical, ritualistic, verbal, or mental worship.

How will this image lead you to the realization of God? Once a lecture was given about an image. Someone in the audience said, "If I have a picture of a tree, and I think of a tree with all its qualities, shall I get the tree with all its fruits?" The answer was "No". If you are given a picture of a tree, and you think of the ideal tree with

its fruits and flowers, you still cannot get the real tree no matter how much you idealize that picture of the tree. Now, suppose you meditate upon an image, or a photograph as the embodiment of Divine Purity. How can God be realized through that? Whenever you worship the Lord, whether by physical means, verbal means, or mental methods, your mind dwells more-or-less on God, and God is the Purest, the Highest, and the finest of all.

When you think of God as the Highest, the Supreme, you are thinking of the Purest, the One who alone is free, the One who alone is perfect, the One who alone is beyond all materiality, Pure Spirit, Supreme Consciousness. Even the slightest thought of that leads to the purification of the mind. Whenever you try to think of God, even though your thinking may be very feeble, very vague, still, it does some good to the mind. Each time you do some practice with the idea of worshipping God, the turning of the mind to God conduces to some purification of the mind. You cannot allow the mind to contact the gross things, because you cannot escape being affected by the gross things, more-or-less. Similarly, if you try to contact God, the Highest, the Eternal in the midst of the non-eternal, your mind will be affected by God's purity. So it is said that any form of

worship you adopt, even for a short time, will do some good to you, and lead to the purification of the mind.

Purification of the mind leads to clarity of vision. You develop the power to grasp the higher reality; subtler perception enables a person to perceive sublter realities. The gross mind can perceive gross things; but the subtle mind, the purified mind, can perceive the subtle realities, such as soul, God, etc. You develop some power of grasping the higher truth, or Divine Reality. With this worship your mind becomes more or less concentrated on God.

As your perception of God becomes clear, you know that God is the all-pervading Reality. He is everywhere. He is the One Self of the universe, the innermost, the finest of all. He is immanent and transcendent. Why do you close your eyes in meditation when worshipping God? Because you want to reach the innermost in yourself. You are turning the inner vision towards the mind, which is finer and subtler; yet, the real Self of man is beyond the mind, It is you, the real man, that watches the pain and pleasure, fear and hope within you because you are distinct from the mind. The innermost in you is your Self. The real Self, the Atman, is at the back of the mind, and that Self is self-evident, because it is

of the nature of Pure Consciousness. Who ever doubts his own presence, his own existence? Not even the child, because essentially he is of the nature of self-luminous consciousness. "I am", no argument is necessary to prove my existence here. There is only One Reality in the whole human personality which is self-shining, self-evident. That principle of Consciousness that is within you, which is the real person, which reveals all objects to you, which reveals even the inner states of the mind, is the only self-luminous principle. There are psychologists and physiologists who try to prove that this consciousness is the result of cerebral processes.

Mind is material. Mind can perceive because, the Seer is behind the mind; the mind can know because the Knower is behind the mind. The mind, therefore falls into the category of the object. Consciousness cannot be the result of mental processes, because mind in itself is a material something, and consciousness is something contrary, and cannot be the outcome of material processes. A material thing can by no means produce consciousness which is self-luminous, and of contrary nature.

The light in this room is apparently self-luminous, but it is not aware of its own existence, nor is it aware of the existence of anything

else. It is a material thing, apparently luminous, but not self-aware. There is only one principle that is self-aware in the human personality, and of a contrary nature from matter. No material process can produce something of a contrary nature. Millions of blind people get together but they cannot produce any kind of vision. Just as the physical objects are devoid of consciousness, similarly, the body is devoid of consciousness, the mind is devoid of consciousness; they cannot produce consciousness. The Self exists by its own right. That is the Reality, and at the back of that Reality is the Supreme Consciousness.

Each time you worship the Lord, your mind becomes concentrated on that Reality, more or less, and it goes to the deeper realm of your personality, behind the mind even. Here is the image of God. You do not actually meditate on the image, you meditate on the Reality that is represented by the image. With closed eyes you meditate on that Reality. Its deeper meaning is the underlying Reality, and it goes beyond the mind. Each time you worship God, even by physical methods, there is some purification of the mind; there will be clarity of vision, your perception of God becomes a little sharper, and then concentration of the mind leads you toward God.

When you adopt the physical form of worship, there is, more or less, concentration of the mind. You cannot carry on any physical worship with the mind wandering about. Hinduism does not confine itself just to concrete images, verbal symbols have also been used. These symbols will lead you to the same Reality. You accept a word which signifies the Divinity to you. The word you repeat. That Divinity which is signified by the image, is also signified by the word. If you repeat the name of "Krishna" and look upon the image of "Krishna", the word means the same Reality.

The perception of God through visual symbols and through image, has been mentioned in the Bhagavatam, one of the oldest and most authoritative of scriptures. Sri Krishna speaks with regard to meditation: "One should meditate on this form (the Vishnu form) concentrating the mind on all the features. The man of self-control should withdraw the organs from the sense-objects with the help of the mind, and with the intellect (understanding) as the guide (he is visualizing the form within, he is not looking at the outer image, concentrating on the deep meaning of the form) he directs the mind to the body of the whole image, and then withdraws the mind to think of the smiling countenance alone, and

nothing else. Withdrawing the mind which is concentrated on the countenance, he then fixes the mind on the Supreme Cause (from that form upon which there is concentration on the visual inner image, the mind now turns to the deeper reality - God as the cause of the universe. Then the mind is led from the concrete symbol to that abstract Reality signified by the symbol.) Then, leaving that, too, the mind should rest on Me (the formless, featureless One) and think of nothing whatsoever." Not only think of the Supreme Being as the cause of the universe, but as the Reality beyond the universe. "With one's mind thus absorbed, one sees Me alone in one's self, and sees one's self united to Me, the Self of all, like Light united to light. A yogi who thus concentrates his mind through intense meditation will soon blow out the delusion about objects, finite knowledge, and action, and realize the Supreme Being that embraces everything."

A word symbol signifying God stands for God, and can be said to be a "seed word" of God Consciousness. In the Hindu religion there are seed words such as the verbal symbol "Om". Any word signifying God, if you accept it as the symbol of God, and repeat that name while trying to concentrate your mind on the meaning, will purify the mind. "Seed words" can

signify divine wisdom, divine love, divine power, etc.

What happens when you approach God through an image, also happens when you approach God through a verbal symbol. When you say a prayer you use many words, but in course of time as your understanding grows deeper, one or two sentences are enough for you. Then, just a word or two will suffice to represent God and his divine wisdom, divine love, divine joy.

Sri Krishna indicates that other processes purify the surface of the mind. There are tendencies, desires at the bottom of the mind, at the subconscious level, which are very difficult to purify. Patanjali suggests even our conscious efforts in the contrary direction purify the subconscious mind. If you have a tendency to be angry, or violent, and you practise consciously something contrary, such as forgiveness, kindness, and charity, that will purify your subconscious mind; yet, that does not always go deep enough. The name of the Lord which has the deepest significance and is very potent, goes to the bottom of the mind and purifies the mind.

If you have a lump of gold and you wash it, it can be polished, but you cannot remove any

alloy that is in the gold. But if you put the same lump of gold in the fire and smelt it, then the real gold and the impurities in it become separated. Similarly, the potent word of God, or the seed symbol which you repeat with devotion from day to day, will actually purify the inner recesses of the mind.

In India there is the repetition of the "word" signifying God, and the form signifying God. Through the word you pray to God; and gradually there will be purification of mind, clarity of vision, concentration of mind, grasping the Reality; the mind turning toward the Reality, and eventually realizing God.

Not only that, Sri Krishna declares God also helps the devotee. It is not that one approaches God and God does nothing; He also moves towards the devotee. As you step forward towards God, God also moves toward you. The Lord actively removes the veil from within. This idea has been very well expressed by Sri Krishna in the Bhagavad-gita: "I am the origin of all, from Me everything evolves; thus thinking, the wise worship me with loving consciousness. With their minds wholly in Me, with their senses absorbed in Me, enlightening one another, and always speaking of Me, they are satisfied and delighted. To them, ever steadfast, and serving Me with

affection, I give that understanding by which they come unto Me. Out of mere compassion for them, I, abiding in their hearts, destroy the darkness born of ignorance by the luminous lamp of knowledge."

As you move towards God, God also moves towards you. As His light becomes manifest within you, all darkness is removed and you see God within.

Swami Vivekananda has this to say about the use of symbols in religion: "In every religion the power of the word is recognized, so much so, that in some of them creation itself is said have come out of the word. The external aspect of the thought of God is the word, and, as God thought and willed before the created, creation came out of the Word.

In this stress and hurry of our materialistic life, our nerves lose sensibility, and become hardened. The older we grow, the longer we are knocked about in the world, the more calloused we become. We are apt to neglect things that even happen persistently and prominently around us. Human nature asserts itself, sometimes, and we are led to wonder at, and inquire into, some of these common occurrences; wondering thus is the first step in the acquisition of light.

Apart from the higher and philosophic and religious value of the word, we may see that sound symbols play a prominent part in the drama of human life. For instance, I am talking to you. I am not touching you; the pulsations of the air caused by my speaking go into your ear, touch your nerves, and produce effects in your mind. You cannot resist them. What can be more wonderful than this? One man calls another a fool, and that other stands up, clenches his fists, and lands a blow on the first man's nose. Look at the power of the word! Or, there is a woman weeping and miserable; another woman comes along and speaks a few gentle words. The doubled-up frame of the weeping woman becomes straightened at once, her sorrow is gone and she begins to smile. Think of the power of these words! They are a great force in higher philosophy as well as in common life. Day and night we manipulated this force without thought and without enquiry."

Chapter 12

The Power of the Word

Word can be uttered; word can also be written. A word is an articulate sound conveying some meaning. Every word is a symbol of an idea. There is a natural relationship between the word and the idea.

It is not that human beings came together one day and decided to call particular objects by particular names. This item you are sitting on is called "chair". It is not that many years ago in ancient days it was decided that this particular object should be called a chair. It has a natural ground, or foundation. Certain ideas have become associated with certain words naturally. When a person knows the meaning of a word, that word conveys the same meaning to another person also.

Word is the means of communication of all thoughts and feelings. It is a vehicle of our ideas as well as our emotions. Any and every idea you can convey through word. For each idea there is a word, and for each kind of emotion there is also a word. Any kind of feeling or sentiment

you can arouse through words - joy, hope, love, on the one hand; and, on the other hand, sorrow, hatred, anger, jealousy. Heroism or depression can be aroused through words. Words can console you, or they can hurt you very deeply, so we must be very careful in the use of words. Even words spoken at random may either help you or hurt you, even though at the time it seems like a mere puff of breath. You cannot make or unmake things only by words. If you say, "Let there be fire," there will be no fire. You have to support words by action in order to make fire.

But almost all religions of the world say that creation, and the power of creation came from words. "Let there be light." And God created the whole universe through words. But human word does not seem to have that kind of creative power. Suppose I praise your dress. Your face does not undergo any change, but still, you feel elated. If I condemn something you have, that object does not undergo any change. For instance, if you have a golden ring, and you say it is not a golden ring, it is a brass ring, the ring will not change in the slightest. Evidently, word does not produce very much effect on external things, but it produces a tremendous effect on human nature. It is with respect to human nature that

you have to consider especially the power of word.

Word is used as one great means of communication, and as one way of educating and training people. All educationists have to depend on word more than on any other symbol. Through books and talk they impart instruction. The politicians try to shape and mould public opinion by propaganda, by lectures, by radio and TV talks. Business people try to influence the minds of people through advertisements. All are instruments of the great power of word. How much we are influenced by the power of word!

More than any others, religious teachers have depended very much on words. They give nothing but words. Generally speaking, business people have to give you some concrete object; politicians have to give you some concrete privileges; education is also preparing for a certain kind of job, for success, prosperity, happiness. Religious teachers give you words more than anything else, so they have to deal especially with words. Their words are very bold. They may not bring you any prosperity, but they give you inner peace, light, freedom, and joy. Actually, their thoughts depend not on words, but on the life they live. Behind their words is a human personality. Unless the speaker can support his

words, unless there is truth behind the words a man utters, these do not produce much effect. In a moment of depression a person may come and say words into your ear. Still, you may not feel consoled. A dear friend may come and speak words. Still, your mind may not be quieted. A time of bereavement may come; you may receive many letters, words of sympathy; still you may not feel soothed within yourself. Then there may come a friend or relative who says just a few words, and you are at once consoled. Behind the words there must be a personality.

Sometimes, a single word will be enough to carry conviction and enlighten your mind. Some say that it is true that human words do not produce very much effect on the external world, but man can develop power by which they can change things by their words. It is said that if a person observes strict truthfulness for twelve years, what he says will surely come to happen. By his blessings he can change the inner nature of a person. His words can perform miracles. If he says, "Let there be fire," there will be fire. This kind of tremendous power man can exercise through words.

Two lepers came to the Teacher (Jesus). He exclaimed, "Be whole," and they were completely cured. In order that words can be effective they

must be supported by the personality of the speaker. The teachings given by the spiritual leaders have great force, not because what they say is true, but because they have issued from the real person who lived that truth. Jesus Christ said, "Heaven and earth may pass away, but my words shall not pass away." So these great teachings alive in words have been the best of humanity. From the earliest days religious records have been preserved. These give you peace, strength, freedom. These are the potent words you read from day to day which give you strength and joy and peace. Many times you have heard of persons who have read the Upanishads, the Bhagavadgita, the Bible, or the Koran, who say, "I read the same thing over and over again." It gives them strength, because there is some strength, force, in the words.

In religious life you have to depend very much on words, because there is no other proof. If I speak to you about something of this world, for instance, I say there are white peacocks or white elephants, I can prove it. You can actually verify my statement. But if I say there is God, it is very difficult to prove to you. So about religious matters, if I say that human nature is essentially pure, it would be very difficult for you to believe, because it is not in the realm of

sense perception. We have to depend on the words of the teacher, or guru.

Religious life begins mostly with faith. The spiritual aspirants have to depend on verbal testimony. Even in this ordinary life we depend very much on verbal testimony. When we read newspapers we do not go to substantiate by actual experience. We depend on it. And in religious life, since religion deals especially with supersensuous verities, one has to depend, at least in the beginning, on verbal testimony. Even in this everyday life we cannot set aside words as a means of proof.

But experience is the primary means of proof, no question about it. Inference is a way of proof. By inference we say the whole road is covered with water, so there must have been rain here before I arrived. By inference you know there has been rainfall. You acknowledge perception; you also accept verbal testimony. You read books, you take them for granted as authoritative. You do not attempt to prove every statement. If you want to prove, first of all, you have to accept.

If a person comes and says there is such a luminous object in the sky - Saturn, Jupiter, Mars - if an atronomer says it, you have to depend on his words, first of all, then you have to verify,

go to the observatory, and get acquainted with astronomer's ways, learn how to use his instruments. Then, after considerable experience you can verify the existence of Saturn. But, in the beginning, if you deny the astronomer's words, there is no way to prove or disprove the existence of Saturn.

In ordinary daily life we depend on words. If you say that last evening you dreamed a dream, can you prove it in any way? You dream, I dream, and I think others also dream. I do not dream every night. You cannot prove to me by inference that you dream every night. I cannot say that because I dream only occasionally, you did not dream last night. By no experience can you establish that. The only way it can be established is by faith, through verbal testimony, accounts of words, as means of proof. I have no other way to prove that you had a nice dream last night. Even in ordinary life we depend very much on words as proof of certain existences.

In religious life, first of all we have to accept verbal testimony as authoritative, then proceed. It is said that an individual has to accept word as proof of God, of some supersensuous reality. Then he has to try to be convinced of this truth by reasoning. Then by particular spiritual courses he will have to experience the truth. Verbal

testimony, word, then reason, then experience. Experience comes last of all in spiritual life. These three things must tally. So we find in spiritual life that words have played a tremendous part. Words are of supreme importance in our ordinary life in the field of education, politics and business. All of our dealings are carried on through uttered words.

There are some special words which are used in spiritual life, words indicative of Truth. You try to advance spiritually, you receive many ideas. Then, gradually, your mind settles down to spiritual life. You find one or two truths can be the guiding principle of life. Many things you read and discuss, and at last your mind becomes concentrated on a certain basic truth. If that truth is expressed by a particular sentence, or formula, and if is repeated from day to day, this will awaken the reality behind this formula.

We find many spiritual aspirants read the same book over and over again, some passages they repeat over and over again. The devotees try to cultivate a devotional nature by singing the same songs over and over again. I have seen persons who throughout the night repeated the same formula. I recall once I was at the foot of the Himalayas, and one holy man was just repeating the one word, RAMA, from early dawn

till evening. I have seen some holy men repeat a certain formula because behind the word, the formula, there is Truth, and the Truth finds expression through the Word.

Behind each word there is an idea. Word is the symbol of idea. The Truth embodied in that formula becomes revealed in the heart by this constant repetition. Very gradually it makes its way. In the case of some formula a person may sing the same religious song from day to day. That will cultivate religious devotion. That formula becomes a very potent seed of spiritual consciousness. A single word becomes the focus of consciousness of all that spirituality means to a person, all that God means: divine power, knowledge, joy, and peace. All these become concentrated in a single word. If a person has true devotion to Jesus Christ, that word itself will be pregnant with all that spirituality means, all that God means. In this way many religious words have been adopted as a means to spiritual development, even to the spiritual experience of God. In our present state of consciousness (restlessness, scattered thoughts, etc.) it is difficult to practise meditation, but in many cases it is possible to repeat the word. I have heard from great saints that the word is the most potent thing to change human nature. These spiritual words,

words relating to divinity, are the best alchemy for changing human nature.

Once I visited a Muslim cottage. That holy man, as far as I remember, belonged to the Sufi sect. He was living in a regular household and we formed a party and went to see him. He was counting his beads on a long rosary. I was young then, and at college. I asked him why he was using the rosary and repeating the word. He replied, "For cleaning things there are different processes. If you want to clean glass you use a chemical. If you want to clean furniture you adopt some other means. If you want to clean cloth or utensils you have some other way. For cleaning the human mind there is also a process. The best soap for the human mind is the repetition of the Lord's name. I am constantly using that soap."

If there is anything which can transform the human mind it is the sacred word, or formula. That is, as far as I know, the best alchemy. Nothing else can transmute this base metal into gold so effectively. There may be other processes than those, but you cannot use them so easily. You will not have to go to church. You can repeat the Lord's name even when you are riding to work, or in the office, or laboratory. Wherever you are you can repeat the word. Just use the true means

the Lord has given you. If You refuse to use the means, this little power given by the Lord, then what other means can you adopt?

Sri Ramakrishna says, "Very potent is the name of the Lord. It cuts asunder the fetter of death."

If you want to escape from death, to go beyond relative existence, the one thing that can cut asunder the fetter of death is the Lord's name. It is like the seed of the peepul tree. It grows very huge, but its seed is very small, smaller than the mustard seed. Birds put the seed on the cornice of a strong monument, and there that seed settles and gradually takes root. In course of time the tree grows very large, and the whole monument crumbles to dust. That little seed has so much power within it that it contains that huge tree which, in time, destroys that big monument. Similarly, this word, the name of the Lord, is like the seed of tremendous spiritual consciousness, that can unfold the whole existence. This word can be adopted and repeated with devotion and faith, and gradually it germinates. It may take time, but it will produce an effect. It cannot be lost.

Besides this word, there are some seed words, mystic words. These mystic words are the veritable seeds of spiritual consciousness. The

divine experience, God vision, which is an inner experience, has also corresponding words. We find some of them in Sanskrit books. These words are called seed words, seeds of spiritual realization. A person can adopt any of these words, a word signifying God's love, God's knowledge, God's power.

According to one's tendencies and capacities, a person can adopt one of those words indicative of divine love, divine power, divine purity, divine joy, divine wisdom. Nurture this word or formula by constant repetition, as far as possible, with faith and devotion. Gradually, it will grow. First of all, it will remove the irregularities of the mind, and purify the mind. Gradually, spiritual consciousness will dawn, and a person will progress toward the goal. But some spade work has to be done. One has to do it patiently, even though mechanically, in the beginning. It may be tormenting to start with but it will become spontaneous later.

It is said that creation came out of word. That word is not exactly the kind of word we use. It is not actually uttered or written word. It is said that God uttered the word, "Let there be light," and there was light. It does not mean that word, or statement. Later there was a different conception of the word. It was neither written

nor spoken. God did not actually vocally say, "Let there be light."

Still there is the Word: "In the beginning there was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." Everything came from that word. What is that Word? That Word theoretically speaking, is called the second Person, Son of God. That Second Person, Son of God, philosophically, is the first move toward creation. Just as an architect, before he creates anything, makes a plan, similarly, God also thought out a plan before creation.

The idea comes first, then the concrete object. It is idea materialized into concrete form. There was a divine idea first before creation. It is called cosmic ideation. That is the matrix of all the concrete objects you experience through the living and the non-living. That is the first move towards the creation. Then comes the Word. It is called *logos* in Greek. *Logos* means the first expression towards the universe, or reason. Used in the sense of reason, *logos* is the first thought, or will, towards creation. In Sanskrit, it has been called *sphota*, seeing, viewing, reflecting. In Sanskrit we find the same word, *Nada-Brahma*. Brahman, the Supreme Being, became at first Word — Nada-Brahma, or Word-Brahman. That means he manifests

himself as the cosmic ideation, the beginning of creation.

From that cosmic ideation everything came out—whatever is created came from Word, as St. John says. So that is the something that stands between God and creation. That is the first move towards creation. That became incarnate in human form as Jesus Christ. In the Vedic literature it is said, "In the beginning there was Hiranyagarbha, the Lord of creation. And with him was the second birth, and everything became created from Word. The Word is the first expression towards manifestation. St. John evidently got the idea from the Jewish philosopher, Philo, who probably got it from the Alexandrian teachers. Alexandria had been the meeting place of the Oriental and Occidental cultures. However, this truth indicates that at the very basis of the Universe is the Word, and all objects are created from that Word. At first that Word became manifest as idea. These ideas found concrete expression as concrete objects. So that Word is the basis of all ideas that exist behind all our words and concrete objects.

Word does not actually convey perception; it conveys conception. When I say the word, chair, it does not refer to a particular chair. It means any chair, chairs in general. When I say the word,

tree, it does not mean any particular tree. It means trees in general. So word actually brings the conception, not perception. Behind all words there are these basic conceptions. All these basic conceptions, ideas, arise from that Supreme cosmic ideation, Word.

The Vedic seers claim they had a word for that Word which exists without any vibration or striking. Every word is produced by some kind of striking. You have to move the lips and tongue in order to produce a word or sound. To make a sound on a musical instrument something must strike. That word which is not struck, that exists spontaneously, that Word has a symbolic word. The Sanskrit Om, represents that Word. The Word which is the matrix of all ideas and which is the matrix of the entire existence, that Word is symbolized by the Sanskrit word, Om. This letter signifies that Word. However, all words, more or less, are the expressions of that one Word. We find the Divine Being is sometimes presented as consisting of Word. Cosmic whole is symbolized by Word. Because all words have a corresponding conception, all these can arise from one basic Word which is the Second Person. Or Word is signified as the Sanskrit word, OM. So Word, they say, can be looked upon as sacred. You choose a Word and always try to relate that Word to

the Supreme Source. It is said that the Lord is all garlanded with letters; all characters of the alphabet are the expression of that Word. Whatever you write in different words, you always have the forms of the alphabet. You cannot go beyond this alphabet. This alphabet has been put together as a necklace of Divine Energy.

I recall a funny incident that occurred when I was in a monastery in a rather isolated location. A young boy belonging to a hill tribe came to us. This monastery was a colony by itself, an isolated unit. The descent and ascent was very difficult. Sometimes they would take a fancy and come to stay with us for a while. This young boy came and said, "I want to learn English." So one Swami taught him the alphabet. This boy felt very free around the monastery. Everybody liked him. After he had learned the alphabet the boy was looking into all the books, including the big books, even the encyclopaedia. After a few days, he said, "I have gone through all these books. I have read them all." The Swami who had taught the boy the alphabet, was surprised. He said to the boy, "You read all these books? What do you mean?" The boy was rather contemptuous of his new learning, as he said, "Nothing but a-b-c-d-e-f-g, that is all."

All the words we use contain nothing but these characters. They have one source, the Divine Word. These characters themselves can signify that Divine Word if you look upon them in that sense. A suggestion has been given in Tantric culture. These words you can put together as a necklace of Divinity, as representing that very Word. So you see words are not very simple things. Words have a tremendous influence in our lives, in our dealings. We need words, also, in order to reach God, in order to attain Illumination. We have to use these words. There are words which can definitely help. The only thing necessary is persistent practise.

CHAPTER 13

The Ego and the Self

What is the ego? The ego is the "I", the conscious subject that identifies itself with the psychophysical system, functions as the experiencer, as the doer, and feels itself as an individual distinct from all external objects. The ego is not the real Self, yet, it is not different from the real Self, altogether. The Self is the very substance, the basis of the ego; in fact, the Self is the reality behind the ego. The ego is the apparent self. The Self appears as the ego.

The Self is pure spirit, self-luminous entity; something that is always aware of itself and aware of whatever else exists. That is the Self. Self-luminous. The light we notice in the physical world is apparently self-luminous, because we do not require any other light to see it; it shines by itself. Yet it is not self-luminous in the sense that spirit or the real Self is, because it is not aware of itself, and it is not aware of anything else. This is the vital difference between the

luminosity of material, physical entities, and the luminosity of spirit, or the Self.

The Self is of the nature of consciousness, that is, awareness is its essential, intrinsic characteristic. Such is true Self. This Self, somehow or other, becomes associated with a kind of ignorance which is called "ajnana." For example, fire is associated with smoke, but smoke is not an essential part of the fire; fire can exist without smoke, yet smoke is sometimes associated with fire. Similarly, this self-effulgent spirit of the nature of consciousness is associated with a kind of ignorance and that creates a seeming limitation, just as a wave is apparently separated from the ocean just by form. Similarly, this self-effulgent spirit, though essentially one with the supreme all-pervading spirit, yet, being associated with some kind of ignorance is apparently individualized, separated from the Supreme Self. Still, that unity continues just as the unity between the wave and the ocean always continues. Similarly, this individual self and the Supreme Self are always united.

Now, the Self associated with this ajnana, ignorance, becomes connected with a particular mode of the mind. It asserts itself as "I", or finds expression as "I" consciousness such as "I am," "I am." This is the ego always asserting itself

as "I," this individualized self-awareness "I am," "I am someone." That Real Self, ever effulgent, ever united with the Supreme Self, associated with some kind of ignorance, as fire is associated with smoke, becomes apparently limited, individualized, and becomes connected with a particular mode of the mind, and then finds expression as "I". That "I" consciousness arises from that unlimited consciousness being associated with a particular mode of the mind. This particular mode of the mind becomes further connected with the psychophysical system. Then it realizes itself as an individual distinct from everything else.

The ego dwells particularly in this physical body in the waking state. This physical body forms the connecting link between the ego and the objective world. In the waking state the ego dwells in this physical body and becomes related to this universe through this body, and all this body contains. So it experiences the world as, "I see," "I hear," "I live in such and such a place. etc." "I must avoid pain even at the cost of your pain."

In this way the ego asserts itself and identifies itself with the whole body as well as with parts of the body, such as the organs and the senses. It functions as the experiencer, as doer, as the worker.

In the waking state it identifies itself with external things. If your pet dog is killed by a motor car, you think you cannot go on without your pet.

This ego recedes from the physical body when one sleeps or dreams, and it lies almost inert, dead, almost insentient. It goes to the subconscious plane, where it becomes mixed with all the urges, tendencies, and desires that are in the subconscious region. This ego becomes anything. It was probably a queen in the waking state, and still is a queen sleeping in her own palace on a comfortable bed. She thinks, "I am a beggar woman. I am nothing." She is lost in the contents of the subconscious mind; lost there at the mercy of those urges, desires, and tendencies. The ego is completely transformed. A dream ego prevails there. The dream ego appears different from the waking ego. The same person, sleeping comfortably, thinks he is being pursued by a tiger.

Then this ego recedes further in deep sleep. Then all these desires and tendencies, urges, that are in the individual arising from the mind—all worries and cares and reveries become lost in a homogeneous state. No thought in the mind, no feeling in the mind, no urge or desire, no cares, not a single fluctuation. How hard it is to quell

these constant ripples that are arising in the mind; all these become completely hushed in deep sleep. All these varieties become lost in a state of homogeneity. All features enter into one homogeneous state.

You do not know what you are, you have neither pleasure nor pain, neither purity nor impurity. You do not know whether you are a teacher or a student, whether you are a king or a queen, or a mother, or a child. That is the state in which you exist, and no ego functions there. You do not know what you are. This is the changing condition the ego is undergoing. When this ego practically dies, then you find rest. In dream, also, there is no rest for you; what to speak of the waking state. The ego is like a yoke, pressing you down constantly, giving you little or no rest. When you nullify this ego, then only you have a little chance of rest in what you call profound or dreamless sleep. That is the only chance of rest you have in the course of twenty-four hours. When you wake up you know that, "I did not know anything. I have had complete rest." Who had complete rest? Who had this experience of non-knowledge or non-apprehension? A completely unconscious thing cannot know that it does not know anything. At the back of that state of complete rest and non-apprehension of

anything, there is the Self as a witness. Because of that witness you know that you had rest, that you did not know anything.

As soon as you wake up that very Self becomes connected with that particular mode of the mind which creates an "I" consciousness, and you function as the "I", as the experiencer, as the doer; you function as a distinct individual moving heaven and earth. The slightest scratch creates fire from that ego, and that ego is undergoing transformation. The only chance for rest is in getting rid of this ego; but you are fighting tooth and nail to assert this ego. While at the back of this ego undergoing all these transformations is the Self. So you say, "I wake up," "I dream," "I sleep." But the ego does not experience sleep, the ego is lost there. Still, you say that "I" who slept and did not know anything, that "I" dreamed, that "I" woke up and experienced the world.

Under all the changing egos (if you call them separate egos) there is one witness Self, unchanging. That is the real experiencer. Just as the same light coming through different mediums has various forms and features, similarly, that effulgent spirit being linked with the body, the mind, and the senses has different manifestations. The same light may appear as green, may appear

as dim, may appear as bright; similarly, that self-effulgent spirit, unchanging, ever at rest, free, pure, is linked with the different conditions of the body and the mind. The mind is functioning in so many ways, that there have been many thinkers who have thought that there is no permanent, enduring self. They believe that these series of egos are all that human personality means, that there is no abiding, continuing spiritual principle in man. Man is just a series of egos. This sense that I am a particular individual, an abiding person, is just a false notion.

Vedanta holds that these egos are only apparent. Underlying, or at the back of these apparent egos, changing egos, there is a real Self. This position is reversed by many philosophers, Occidental and Oriental. They say, "No. This continuous series of changing egos is the Reality. That is all that exists, and what you imagine as the abiding Self is simply false. It does not exist."

Many centuries ago there lived a Buddhist philosopher named Nagasena. The Greek King Minander, who is called Millinda in Pali, approached him and addressed him as Sir Naga-sena. "Who do you call Nagasena?" was the answer. "Is this hand Nagasena? Is this head Nagasena? Nagasena is nothing. He is simply a

conglomerate of ever-changing physical and psychical elements. Every moment each and every part of the body is changing in a state of flux. This is all that Nagasena means." That was the view held by one Buddhist school of philosophers.

In the modern age, also, many western philosophers have advocated the same view. David Hume, the British philosopher, who lived in the eighteenth century, also asked, "What does human personality mean? If I investigate into my nature, I find simply a series of perceptions. There is no permanent perceiver at the back of these perceptions."

Humes's view was also subscribed to by later philosophers. The great psychologist and philosopher, William James, also said the same thing, "All a human personality means is a series of momentary "I's." They also give an example to substantiate their view that when you see a motion picture, you actually see a series of disconnected pictures, and you see apparently connected scenery. Similarly, these are all disconnected "I's", one following another in quick succession and what you perceive as "I" is not a permanent "someone". The Buddhist used to give another example where you take a torch, or a string with a ball of fire at the end. When

you twirl it around, the ball of fire appears to make a solid circle, but there is no solid circle, just a point of light twirling very fast.

Vedanta asks the question, "What sustains these series of egos?" Actually, there is some reason why you see the disconnected pictures as one continuous, coherent picture, that there is a background on which all these are connected. At the back of these pictures there is your optic nerve, a permanent background to connect these disconnected pictures. Similarly, there is a permanent background which connects all these series of egos. They do not sustain themselves.

Actually, it is not that the "I" that sees and the "I" that talks are two different "I's"; the same "I", the "I" that sees, that very "I" hears, that very "I" talks. The very "I" that is talking here, that very "I" is seeing you, and that very "I" which is seeing me, is also hearing me. There are not two "I's". But they say (the Buddhists, etc.) that there are two different "I's" in quick succession.

Suppose you gave me a description of your house, and the next day I see your house. I, at once know, this is the house you described to me. Now, if the person who heard about the house be different from the person who sees the house, then could the person who heard about

the house recognize the house? This means that the very person who heard about the house is now seeing the house.

So, it is not two distinct individuals, one hearing about the house and the other seeing the house. Actually, it is one. At the back of all these egos there is one Self, one experiencer, one witness. That real Self is always existing there as the witness. That which is the ultimate Knower, the ultimate Seer, the ultimate Experiencer—what can experience that? Because nothing can objectify that, nothing exists at the back, or behind that. That is ever the knower and never known, ever the Seer and never the seen. You can realize yourself as such; you cannot objectify that. That Self is called "kutastha", steady like an anvil. Beyond all the fluctuations, beyond all the physical and psychical conditions the ego is going through, that Self maintains your identity. Your body is changing, your mind is also changing, and still, you know the same one is existing; that same little child is now a grown-up grandmother or grandfather. The body is completely changed, the mind is changed beyond recognition, and still, you know that you are the same.

What maintains your identify? That unchanging rock-steady Self maintains your identity. That is the real experiencer. You say that

"I knew this twenty years ago and I still know it." Memory would have been impossible if this "I" had changed. You experienced something twenty years ago, and see it again at the present time. You say, "Yes, this is the same thing I saw twenty years ago." That Self is always existing, unchanging.

William James used to defend himself with this argument: "These series of I's continue and are all momentary. The preceding one gives to the succeeding one something of its own. From that you get memory." Now, yesterday, for example, you saw a person, then when you see him today, you recognize him. According to the theory of momentary egos, you saw the person and that ego is gone. You are another "you" who sees him today, and still you recognize him. There is continuity in the series—the preceding ego gave to the succeeding some of its own.

Sankara has refuted this argument by saying, "Now you say that each ego is momentary, one ego dies, another ego comes. One ego subsides, another ego appears. Now, if that be the position, then how can you say that one ego, the preceding ego, transfers something of its own to the succeeding ego? Do they exist simultaneously, and, if they exist simultaneously, then the theory of momentary ego cannot stand."

Knowledge also becomes impossible. You have to synthesize your past experiences and present experiences in order to get knowledge. So, at the back of these changing egos there is one permanent unchanging ego, which is the real knower. If you hold the position that you are nothing but a series of changing egos, what prospect do you have in this life? Death is awaiting you; there cannot be any existence beyond death because there is nothing permanent in you. Nothing survives what we call death, yet it does not explain the deep longing man has for eternal life, and absolute peace.

Vedanta takes the position that there is an abiding Self that explains this deep longing within the heart for eternal life, for permanence. Why are you constantly seeking permanence in the impermanence? Why do you expect perfection in this world, or beyond this world? Because perfection is in your nature. Why do you seek freedom? Because freedom is in your nature. Why do you seek eternity, because eternity is in your nature. Your very Self is *that*, and that Self is constantly asserting itself.

Under all these changing conditions of life, that Self is reigning supreme. That very Self is now functioning as the ego. One has to get out of this ego and realize the Self. We forget the

real Self and become identified with the changing conditions of the mind and take the ego to be the real Self. This is the cause of all our troubles; our sufferings and bondages arise from this wrong identification.

Egoism is defined in the Yoga aphorisms of Patanjali as that of the identification of the seer, the real knower, with the instrument of seeing. The real seer, the eternal witness, that somehow or other becomes identified with the instrument of seeing, with the other organs, with the mind, becomes identified and being identified, it ascribes to itself all the changing conditions of the mind. "I am happy," "I am unhappy," "I am pure," "I am impure," "I am virtuous," "I am wicked," "I am weak," "I am strong": all these feelings come because you identify yourself with this mind. Similarly, being identified with the senses, if one loses an eye, he will think, "I am blind in one eye." If a person loses a leg, or a hand, he will think, "I am crippled." This is egoism. Being identified with the body and the mind, you always think, "I am the doer, I am the experiencer." You forget the real Self, ever shining, pure and free, birthless, deathless, decayless, ageless.

The solution to this problem is that you realize your real Self. You become what you

really are. Before this realization you were just like a king who has forgotten, under the spell of amnesia, that he is the king. Not only has he forgotten himself, but he has also got the idea that he is a common man, so he asks everybody, "Where is the king?" He is seeking the king here and there, but how can he find the king when he, himself, is the king?

Similarly, that which you are seeking, that eternal peace, that absolute freedom, that joy, that light which never dies out, that which you are constantly seeking, your very self is *that*. All that you have to do is to realize your real Self and its essential oneness with the Supreme Self. Though the king forgets himself, still, the king is always the same king. Similarly, though you forget yourself, and under the spell of amnesia you think you are a common man, just a physical being subject to birth, growth, decay, and death, youth and old age, these are the changing conditions you inevitably go through, some false notions you impose upon yourself. Underlying this, the same Self is still there, and you have to realize this Self.

All the teachers say that one way is to conquer this ego, but it is very difficult to do this. Even in a very ordinary man the ego is wide awake. Just as a very high class man has a sense

of prestige, even a beggar has a sense of prestige. There is some point where, if you hurt him, that ego will flare up. It is very difficult to overcome, but unless you can overcome this ego you cannot realize the true nature of your Self, and you cannot attain freedom.

The great religious teachers say that when this ego will not disappear, make this ego quite subservient to the Supreme ego, to the Supreme Self. Surrender this ego to the Lord of the universe. You may try to crush this ego in one way, but it will reappear in another form. It takes a finer and finer form; from the crude form it changes into a finer form.

You may think you are a wicked person, so you change your life. Then you say, "I am an honest man, purer than anybody else." That ego has changed, but it is not less strong to bind you. It is more refined, but it is stronger than before to bind. That pure ego, that holy ego, can bind you more than this unholy ego.

A story may illustrate the problem. There was a person whose name was Kanva. He was a very successful man. He had wealth, he had a good social position, and he had learning. His father was a saintly man who had retired from the world. In India, there is a system that provides that in the declining years of life, you

retire, leaving the responsibilities to the grown-up children while you retire to meditate on spiritual truths. Kanva's father had retired from the world and was living in seclusion. At first, Kanva was very happy, but then he began to feel like he was missing something. He could not find the peace he wanted. He had children, a very devoted wife, a good house, enough wealth and all the amenities a man could desire. Still he didn't find inner peace. He pondered over this. People would come to him for the solution of their problems and were very much satisfied, but, Kanva thought, "Everybody says he finds peace by coming to me, but I do not find any peace in myself." He went to his father.

He told his father of his problem, "Others find peace by coming to me, but I find none." His father said, "Kanva, the peace that you seek is different from the peace they are seeking. They seek peace of the world, which is just a temporary removal of some grievance. A person is suffering from some illness, and when that illness is removed he has peace. A person is suffering from some want, remove the want and he has peace. This is a temporary peace they seek, so they have a temporary solution and they get a temporary peace. But the peace you are seeking is an abiding peace. This world or anything of

this world cannot give you that abiding peace. If you want that peace then you have to realize the real Self, realize your oneness with the Supreme Self." Kanva went home and pondered over this problem. He decided he would retire to the woods and live like a hermit. Still, he could not find peace.

Years passed. He went back to his father. "I have given up everything and have constantly meditated on the real nature of the Self, trying to get rid of all bondages, but still, I do not find peace."

Then the father said, "Kanva, you have given up everything, but one thing thou lackest. You have not been able to give up this ego, because you still think you are a great saint. You are so learned, you are such a holy person, you have given up everything. Now surrender this ego!"

Sri Ramakrishna says, "When this ego dies then all troubles cease; also, when this ego subsides in deep sleep, then only you are free from all worries and cares, and you get some temporary relief."

In the spiritual life this ego is completely surrendered in the Supreme Self. By losing this ego you gain yourself, you find yourself, and then you gain peace. Sri Ramakrishna says: If you want to realize the Self, you must sacrifice this ego.

Always think of your real Self, and always think that you belong to Him completely. You are His and His alone." We must know that this ego is not the whole of human personality, and that this series of changing egos also does not constitute the human personality. At the back of these egos there is the unchanging, ever-shining Self. That is your true nature and that you have to realize. As long as you hold to the ego you always distinguish between good and evil, high and low, you cannot get out of it. Today, vice is binding you; tomorrow virtue binds you. You will not be able to go beyond the duality of good and evil.

A person goes beyond this duality only when he becomes united with the Supreme Self. This duality of life and death, of good and evil, of darkness and light, continues until the ego is hushed. The secret of eternal light, absolute peace, is the merging of this ego into the Supreme Self; and that is the highest spiritual practice.

By all of your devotional disciplines what are you doing? You are simply linking yourself to the Supreme Lord. Instead of living in this world and asserting this ego, you are simply surrendering this ego to the Lord. By bowing down in the temple, by bringing flowers, by serving the temple, by saying prayers, by practising

austerities, by observing fasts or vigils, by performing charitable deeds, all that you are doing is relating yourself to Him to whom you belong.

All these egos are not actually quite unreal. They are apparent. Vedanta draws a distinction between existence and reality. Anything that exists is not real, as for example, you see a mirage. It is not absolutely false, is not as false as the son of a barren woman. The son of a barren woman cannot appear even in an illusion. If you see in an illusion a son, it must be a son of a woman who is other than barren. So the son of barren woman does not appear even in an illusion. Even these apparent egos are not as false in that sense. Each and every experience, according to Vedanta, is real in its own sphere. It may be hallucination, it may be a dream, it may be the imagination. Any experience is real in its own sphere. All these egos are real, though apparent in their respective spheres. But behind all these changing egos, there is one abiding Self. Just as behind all the apparent movements of the sun, (the various features we notice in the sun) there is the permanent sun, stationary, resplendent. When you reach that you go beyond all the changing conditions of the weather, and the change of night and day. There is no night and day in the sun.

Similarly, at the back of all these changing egos, there is the same ever-shining, Supreme Self. When you reach there, then all these varied experiences, though real from this particular egoistic standpoint, are all unreal. A person has to get out of this ego and realize the Self. This is the solution to all his problems and all spiritual disciplines are intended to get him out of this ego to realize the Self.

Some Vedantic Truths Concerning The Ego And the Self.

A person is known to be born, to grow, to decay, to die. He appears to be fair or dark, robust or slim, tall or short, young or old, subject to hunger or thirst, heat and cold, pain and pleasure, hope and fear, weakness and strength, knowledge and ignorance. Yet, this is not the true view of man.

Vedanta declares again and again that man who appears to be mortal is really immortal! Although he appears bound, he is really free. He appears to be weak, but he is really the source of all strength. When a person realizes his true self, he becomes free in every sense. The apparent man and the real man are not two different entities.

Just as the sun, ever stationary and resplendent, appears to move, to be dim or bright, to rise or set, so the unchanging self of man which

appears to be changeable, is ever self-luminous, respendent, ever stationary within his central being.

That which is changeful, manifest to our common experience, and which is known as our psychophysical being, is the ego. Vedanta says that no one can understand the truth about his true identity through reasoning power.

CHAPTER 14

Death And After

Some may say, "Why should we bother about death? We should rather bother about life." Life and death are inseparably connected. To all appearances every form of life ends in death. Our view of life depends on our view of death, and our view of death depends on our view of life.

If death be the end of the human individual, then our sense of justice remains unsatisfied. Many suffer in this world for no fault of theirs. Then there are wicked persons who go scot-free. Our labour is unrequited in this world; our desires are unfulfilled, our hopes are unrealized. Such theories as accidentalism, materialism, naturalism, or atheism are closely associated with the view of life that death is the termination of an individual's existence. But religions always hold that an individual survives what we call death. In this world of uncertainties, one thing is certain—death! We may ignore it, we may deny it, but death does not ignore us. It is inevitable,

irrevocable. Once an individual enters into the jaws of death, he never comes back. However, there have been different views with regard to death. The materialists, the atheists, the accidentalists, the naturalists, generally hold that death means annihilation of an individual. There are some religions such as Judaism, Christianity, and Mohammedanism which believe that death means only a separation from the body. They believe in resurrection of the body, a rising again at some distant time.

According to Vedanta, there is reincarnation but you don't get back the same physical body. Vedanta holds the view of complete liberation from this body-mind complex. We leave this physical body at the time of death, there is no doubt about it. There is, as all other religions hold, an immortal essence in every human personality. Beside this physical body, there is the subtle body. The main component factor of the subtle body is the mind. This physical body is the seat of our waking experience. The physical body establishes our contact with the outside world. Through the organs in the physical body, we communicate with this objective existence. Then, our consciousness also recedes from this physical existence, not completely, but mainly. It goes to the subtle body. Just as this physical body is

the seat of the waking experience, so the subtle body is the seat of the dream experience. Because consciousness recedes from the physical body, the physical body does not respond to any external stimulous. Besides the mind, which is the main component of the subtle body, there are other component factors of the subtle body.

There are the five organs of action; the legs, the hands, the organ of speech, the organ of generation, the organ of evacuation. These physical organs are not the real organs. The organs also exist in very subtle form. So all these physical organs of action have their subtle counterparts and these subtle counterparts belong to the subtle body.

Then we have five organs of perception—the organ of hearing, the organ of seeing, the organ of tasting, the organ of smelling, the organ of touching. These five organs of perception, evidently located in the physical body, also have their subtle counterparts.

In dream, also, you hear, you see, you smell things. These subtle counterparts of the external sense organs also form part of the subtle body. Then there is a life principle that functions in this system. There are biologists who do not uphold the view of a something distinct as a life principle. But Vedanta holds there is a distinct

vital principle, distinct from the five organs of action, and from the five organs of perception, and distinct also from the mind. It is this principle in the psychophysical system that keeps the psychophysical system alive. Even when consciousness recedes from this body, some of the biological processes continue. These are the respiration, the circulation of blood, digestion, movement in the intestines, because the life principle continues to work in the physical body.

It will not respond to any stimulus, but the life principle is still there. Had the life principle been conscious, there would have been a response from your ears, from your eyes, from your organ of touch; but there was no response even though this life principle was operating in the physical system. This life principle has five different functions, broadly speaking. According to these five functions, the same life principle, has five names.

There is the life principle that is responsible for respiration. The same life principle is responsible for digestion, and evacuation, as well as all kinds of movements, because the life principle works on the nervous system. Any work requiring much energy is due to the life principle VYANA, which pervades the whole body. There is also another function of the life principle, that which helps the departing spirit to leave the body.

It takes the departing soul of the virtuous, to the realm of the virtuous; it takes the departing spirit of the sinful to the realm of the sinful.

The five organs of action, the five organs of perception, the five life forces, the mind, and the intellect these seventeen factors in their subtle forms constitute the subtle body. Besides the subtle body, a person has a causal body. The causal body is simply the finer phase of the subtle body. Even though the seed is the causal state of the tree, we do not notice all the latent diversities of the tree in the seed.

Similarly, all the diversities of the human mind—ideas, feelings, thoughts, tendencies, talents, all enter into the latent state, and that latent state of the subtle body is the causal body. How do you know there is such a state, the causal state? It comes from experience. Just as this physical body is the seat of waking experience, so, the subtle body is the seat of dream experience. You do not dream through this physical body, nor even through the brain. The brain is almost inoperative at this time. Then, you experience dream through the subtle body, and you experience deep sleep through the causal body.

In the causal state, all features are lost, and all diversities of the mind such as your ideas, thoughts and feelings, even any form of

consciousness, subsides. That is, the entire subtle body with all its diversities enters into the causal state during deep sleep. That causal body is the seat of your sleep experience, the subtle body is the seat of dream experience, and the physical body is the seat of the waking experience.

When a person dies what happens? The subtle body is also a material "something", because anything different from spirit is material. Pure spirit has consciousness as its essence, and nothing else has consciousness as its essence. Mind has no consciousness as its essence. It is the knowing Self that observes the mental states; that has consciousness as its essence.

Consciousness belongs to the knower, *per se*, and not to the known, the object. Subtle body is not self-luminous, it is not characterized by self-aware. The subtle body pervades the whole body and being of very fine materials, it is capable of instantaneous contraction and expansion. For example, air is more capable of expansion and contraction than a piece of wood; light is more capable of contraction and expansion than a clod of earth.

When a person dies, the subtle body which pervades the whole body is gradually contracted. The contraction begins from the extremities, from the feet, legs, hands, etc. The subtle body is

composed of the subtle organs as well as the vital principle. As the person loses the power that is in the feet, the subtle body and the life principle also recede. As the life principle recedes the legs become almost frozen. Then from the hands, also, the subtle body gradually contracts and the hands cannot respond to any heat or cold and become frozen, so to speak. Then from the organ of speech, the life principle recedes. Where does it go?

The location of the pure spirit is in the heart, which is the most vital and central part of the psychophysical system. There, gradually, the subtle body recedes close to the Self. As it recedes, gradually the organ of speech cannot function, the eyes cannot see, the ears cannot hear, still the respiration continues. Then gradually that also stops. With the help of the vital principle, which is called udana, the departing Self, clothed with the subtle body, leaves this physical shell behind.

At death only this physical shell is lost, but all the contents of the mind you carry with you. Your weaknesses, your excellences, your wisdom and your follies you take with you. Nothing in your inner nature can you leave behind, but anything in the external world, including your body, you are bound to leave behind. Not a grain

of dust can you carry with you, not a piece of hair can you carry with you, but nothing of the subtle body, including your mind, can you leave behind. Any characteristic you have acquired of the hands, such as the power of painting, you carry with you. If you have any expertness in dancing, you carry it with you. If you have developed any particular knowledge, you carry that with you. Equipped with all the tendencies, desires and ideas of the mind, and talents, also, you leave this physical body.

Where does a person go? It depends on the kind of life a person has lived, and it depends upon his own inner nature that he has developed in this life. When a person dies some thoughts, ideas, and desires become prevalent. Just as in the dream state some ideas and thoughts become prevalent; they have their own course, so you cannot say exactly what idea will be prevalent. In a general way it is said, those ideas, those desires, and those tendencies which are usually prevalent in you are likely to be prevalent in you at the time of death. The prevalent thoughts, ideas, feelings, and desires will be dominant at the time of death. Other ideas will be at the subconscious level.

In the dream state all our thoughts and ideas are not equally prevalent. Similarly, at the time

of death there is inner consciousness, though outer consciousness is lost. The person has some ideas and thoughts prevalent, and those ideas, and thoughts, and feelings, actually lead the departing soul to where it should be. In this life, also, it is our inner nature that directs us where we should go, and to where we should not go, what we should do, and what we should not do.

Persons who are devoted to God wholeheartedly, naturally think of God, naturally they reach God. There are some persons who have worshipped God with single-hearted devotion, filled with God-consciousness, more than the consciousness of anything else; they can even leave the body with consciousness. We find in the Bhagavad-gita, a reference to those who are capable of leaving the body with full consciousness. It is said:

"He who, at the time of passing away, steady in mind, filled with love and armed with the strength of yoga (concentration on God) fixes his prana between his brows and meditates on the omniscient and primal Being, the Ruler, the Dispenser of all, who is subtler than an atom, whose form is beyond all comprehension, and who, like the glorious sun is beyond all darkness; he who thus meditates, reaches the

resplendent Supreme Person." Consciously meditating on God they leave the body, but all cannot do that. There are devotees who do not seek anything else but God, who worship God for God's sake. If they succeed in remembering God, then they also will reach God. The Bhagavadgita says: "Even at the time of death if a person remembers Me," says Sri Krishna, as Lord of the universe, "he will reach Me. And who at the time of death leaves his body remembering Me alone, he attains My being; concerning this there is no doubt."

How does he go? Where does he go? It is said that he (an illumined person) goes through a luminous path, because he has the knowledge of the Ultimate Reality whom we call God. He lives in Light. After death, with the consciousness of God, he traces that path, that luminous path. Because he is moving towards the source of all light, he reaches what is called in Vedanta "Brahmaloka" and which is called in the Bible "the Kingdom of God." According to Vedanta, this is the highest realm of the relative existence. There, he does not lose his individuality. His individuality is retained because of his subtle body, which is clothed with a fine vesture. He goes to that realm called the "Kingdom of God" where he lives in God-consciousness. Such

a person is completely beyond the cycle of birth and death. He will not be compelled to come back to this mortal plane. He lives in God-consciousness as a free soul.

There are persons who may not be able to remember God; who may not be able to carry God-consciousness within their hearts at the time of death. What will happen to them? This same question was asked by Arjuna to Sri Krishna: "A man who is endowed with faith, but not with steadfastness, and whose mind has wandered away from yoga - what end does he gain? O Krishna, having failed to attain perfection in yoga, fallen from both (from the spiritual course and also from the worldly course) and unsupported and bewildered in the way leading to Brahman, does he not, O Mighty Krishna, perish like a riven cloud?" Then Arjuna further says: "You should completely dispell, O Krishna, this doubt of mine, for no one but you can destroy such a doubt."

The Lord said, "O Arjuna, there is no destruction for him, either in this world or the next. No evil, my son, befalls a man who follows the spiritual course. The man who has fallen away from yoga (that is, the spiritual path) goes to the world of the righteous; having lived there for many years, he is reborn in the home of the pure and the prosperous."

He does not go to that Kingdom of Heaven, which is called Brahmaloka, but he goes to other high realms, where he lives in happiness for many years; or he is born in a family of yogis rich in wisdom; verily, such a birth is hard to gain in this world; or he is born in a family of spiritual persons. There he comes in touch with the knowledge acquired in his former birth; that knowledge he carries within him, and that knowledge he regains, that knowledge becomes manifest in his later body. By the former practice alone he is led on in spite of himself. He had those spiritual tendencies, he is led by those spiritual tendencies, even though there may be some untoward forces working within him, but in spite of himself he is led by his spiritual tendencies. "Even he who merely wishes to know of yoga, arises superior to the performer of rites with worldly desires."

There are persons who perform deeds in this world with desire for prosperity, with desires for happiness. There are some persons who realize the futility of worldly wealth and pleasures; they think there may be some region beyond death, beyond this mortal world, where they can live happily. If these persons perform righteous deeds with that objective, they may carry on philanthropic deeds, they may discharge their social

and family duties with that objective, and if they have adequate merit, they can go to a high region which can be conceived of as a paradise. This is not, however, the Kingdom of God, which is the realm of freedom. If a person by meritorious deeds goes to such a region, he cannot live there indefinitely. In the course of time his karma, work, that led him there will become exhausted, bringing him back to this world.

This human life is considered to be the plane which affords opportunities for complete moral and spiritual development. A person who goes to a plane like a paradise cannot acquire anything new. Here in this human plane there is conflict, because you have the power of discrimination between right and wrong, between the apparent and the false. Because of this power of discrimination, the human mind goes through a war, and this war gives him the possibilities of the greatest moral and spiritual development. So, according to the Vedantic view, only the human plane presents the way to complete liberation.

A person after enjoying life in what is called paradise, comes back to this world, or, if he has performed wrong deeds throughout life he will go to some infernal region after death, because his tendencies will lead him there. Nobody else

is responsible. A person's own actions and thoughts will be the sole guiding factor in leading to the realm that he deserves. There also, in the nether region, a person cannot live indefinitely, so he will have to come back to gain new experience. This is the realm of experience and action. If you go to a place of vacation you are in a different mood, and no new acquisition is possible for you there. You may be led by good instincts, but only this cannot lead to further development in life. Animals are led by instincts, but there is no moral life in the animal kingdom.

There may be some superhuman beings who are virtuous and innocent, without conflict. They don't have the tendency to discriminate between bondage and freedom, between good and pleasant, between the false and the apparent. Only innocent creatures cannot develop adequately to deserve the Kingdom of Heaven. In human life there is a conflict between good and evil tendencies; the power of discrimination between right and wrong. Man is apparently finite, yet, he carries within him a deep longing for the infinite; man is apparently mortal, yet, he has a deep longing for immortality; man is apparently imperfect, yet, he has an urge for perfection. There is within man an element of perfection, an element of immortality, an element of the

infinite. Because of this, the human mind refuses to be reconciled to the fact of death. This is one of the strangest facts, that death may befall us any way, any where, any time, yet, it seems to us that death is far away.

To whatever sphere a person may go, lower, or higher, for his moral and spiritual progress, he will have to come back to the human plane, except in the case of those who go to the Kingdom of God. They will not return for self-purification, or self-development; but the rest will come back to this human plane for self-purification. After exhausting those tendencies in the higher world, he will have other tendencies which are latent. Some of those latent tendencies will again become prominent in the mind and will lead him back to this worldly plane.

Here he will seek his parents; parents do not make the children. The child is an individual soul clothed with the subtle body which also has a physical vesture with it in a very subtle form. That subtle body, associated with food, enters into the body of the father. Through the father it comes into the body of the mother.

Where will it go? It is said that persons who worship God but fail to realize him, will be reborn in a family of the virtuous. Persons who perform righteous deeds, live a virtuous life, and

yet, cannot go to that kind of realm, which we call paradise, they also will be born in a prosperous state, and experience mostly joy in this life. Persons who do not go to that internal region, but perform evil deeds, they will also be born in this world, but in lower planes. Those who have a mixture of good and evil, usually are born at the human level, in this world. They do not go to any other place. In due course the departed soul comes again to this earthly plane.

At death we leave only this physical body; the subtle body carries within it everything else. Our entire inner nature goes with us, and that inner nature determines our course after death. This much we understand, that death, from the Vedantic viewpoint, is simply the change of the physical body.

Sri Krishna says in the Bhagavad-gita, "Just as a person casts off old clothes, and puts on new ones, similarly, a person leaves this present body, and puts on a new body." There is nothing to be frightened about death. Death is inevitable; we have to face it. Actually, it is only the separation from the physical body, everything else you carry with you. So a person has to be very careful what he acquires in this life.

What are the courses? Your own tendencies, thoughts, feelings, and desires, will be prominent

at the time of death. You are constantly building your own way after death. Sri Krishna says, in the Bhagavad-gita, "If you want to go beyond this cycle of birth and rebirth, you have to reach Me who am beyond relativity of life and death, light and darkness, of growth and decay, of success and failure. Pure spirit, the Supreme Being, alone is above dualities. So if you want to go beyond this play of dualities, you have to reach Me, and constantly think of Me, and when you leave this body, naturally, the thought of Me will be uppermost in your mind, and that will carry you through the path of light to the source of all lights."

If you fail to reach God, there is nothing to be afraid of, because you will begin from where you left off. Once you gain the spiritual treasure, you gain it forever. It is like pure gold, which cannot rust or rot. Anything you do in the name of the Lord, if it is done with true devotion, is a permanent asset. Once you begin it, it will not be destroyed. Suppose you start arranging for a dinner, if you don't complete it, your labour is lost. Suppose you start building a house. If you do not complete it, gradually, it will crumble. Spiritual treasure is not of that kind. If you acquire any spiritual worth, and then you stray away from the spiritual course, whatever you

acquire will be a permanent asset. In course of time, it will again assert itself and you begin from where you left off. Even death cannot cancel it. Sri Krishna says, "Persons, who succeed in reaching Me consciously are very blessed. There are persons who consciously cannot remember me, but somehow or other that thought prevails in their mind, they also reach Me; and there are persons who may not be able to reach Me they will come back to that environment which is congenial to spiritual development."

There are persons who have done philanthropic deeds. They may succeed in going to the realm which is called "Paradise." They go generally by a dark path, because they do not have the knowledge of the source of all light. In spite of their goodness they live in ignorance with regard to the Reality. They follow the path of darkness, until they reach the "Paradise". But even if they don't reach the "Paradise", they will be born in the world in prosperous homes. They will experience the joys of life, and through this experience, they will gradually realize the inadequacy of all worldly prosperity. Then and then alone their mind can turn to God.

They will develop within them spiritual consciousness, and they will come to know that

beyond the dualities there is a spiritual reality which is absolutely good, and they will seek that. Then there are others who may do misdeeds; they may go to the lower region but will not remain there indefinitely. There they will mend their character by suffering; but there is no new acquisition there, so they come back to this world of action. Human life is considered to be the field of action, the other regions are considered to be the fields of experience.

You experience pleasure or pain, and you work. Unless you enter into a field of action, you cannot have any new acquisition. It is a unique opportunity for self-development for all individuals. In course of time, your character to that point will be mended and you will come back to this human plane where you may perform more misdeeds, according to your development. At the same time you will also come to realize where the misdeeds led you.

You will turn to the virtuous path, and by performing virtuous actions, you will experience more joys of life, more plenty. Gradually, when you will realize the inadequacy of this life of prosperity, you will seek God as the Supreme end of life.

Vedanta delineates what happens after death, as well as what death means. Death means

only change of this present body, and through death we find access to higher and higher stages of life, but it all depends upon what kind of life we live. Where we go after death depends upon how we live in this world.

CHAPTER 15

Spiritual Visions and Ecstasies

Spiritual visions and ecstasies are recorded in the lives of many saints, mystics, and even in the lives of lesser personalities. In almost all the religions of the world, these visions and ecstatic experiences, however unusual, should not be identified with hallucination, or any kind of epileptic condition, because the results of these experiences are different from the results of mental aberrations. Mental aberration weakens a person, but these spiritual experiences strengthen a person mentally, morally, and physically. Swami Vivekananda used to say that anything that weakens one morally, mentally and physically, know that to be irreligion. That is religion that actually gives one strength, purity, real understanding, and stability of the mind.

One incident I recall from the life of St. Paul, who was a Jewish Rabbi in Jerusaleum. He was

born in the first year of the Christian era. On his way to Damascus he had a strange vision. He was an arch enemy of Christianity, and his intention in going to Damascus was for persecuting Christians, but he had a vision of Jesus Christ. That vision completely transformed him and he who wanted to be the worst persecutor of the Christians, became the worst victim of religious persecution.

What he said about this persecution that he underwent, he told in the Second Epistle to the Corinthians: "For which cause we faint not but though our outer man perish, yet our inward man is renewed day by day." And how could that be if that vision of "something" had been hallucination. He became one of the greatest apostles, if not the greatest, of Christianity. His epistles are full of spiritual gems.

In the life of Sri Ramakrishna we find myriads of spiritual visions and ecstasies. Not a day passed in which he did not have some kind of extraordinary experience. Some thought that he had some kind of mental malady, but his life showed that he was possessed of profound wisdom. Sometimes he would be completely devoid of outer consciousness in a state of samadhi, so much so, his heart-beats stopped, his pulse stopped, even the eyeballs would not

respond. On one occasion one of the doctors attending on him touched his eyeball, the eyeballs did not respond. To all appearances he was dead, yet, he was alive. And then, sometimes, in a state of semi-consciousness, out of ecstatic joy, he would sometimes dance. Tears would trickle down his cheeks, horripilation was noticed all over his body; and then when he was in what we call the normal state of consciousness, he would give instruction to those who came to him for instruction. These instructions are recorded in "The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna" which is now counted as one of the World's religious classics.

Not only Sri Ramakrishna but his disciples had many extraordinary experiences. Sri Ramakrishna's visions and ecstasies can be, broadly speaking, classified under different heads. He had the vision of divine forms, such as the form of Kali, the form of Shiva, the form of Vishnu, and others. He saw the Divine Mother appearing before him, talking with him, and constantly keeping company with him. He saw visions of great spiritual leaders that are counted as messengers of God, or the incarnations of God. He saw Ramachandra who appeared to him as a child. He saw Sri Krishna; he saw Muhammad; he saw Jesus Christ. He did not lose

his mind in spite of all these experiences. Some of his visions were experiences of past events.

Before Mahendranath Gupta (who recorded the daily conversations of Sri Ramakrishna) came, Sri Ramakrishna had a vision. He saw that Mahendranath Gupta was in the party of Sri Chaitanya. Before Swami Ramakrishnananda and Swami Saradananda came, (they were cousins, their family names were Sashi and Sarat) Sri Ramakrishna had a vision showing that these boys belonged to the party of Jesus Christ. The very day they came, the questioning turned on the benefits of married life, and Sri Ramakrishna said, "Just see that book" (a Holy Bible was kept in his room, and also a picture of Jesus Christ rescuing Peter from drowning). They read, "for there are some eunuchs, which are born from their mother's womb; there are some eunuchs, which were made eunuchs of men; and there are eunuchs, which have made themselves eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven's sake. He that is able to receive it, let him receive." Sri Ramakrishna then asked them to read Saint Paul: "I say therefore to the unmarried and widows, it is good for them if they abide even as I. But if they cannot contain let them marry; or it is bettter to marry than burn."

Sri Ramakrishna did not say he knew them to be followers of Jesus Christ, or disciples, but he referred to these passages. He did not say what he thought about married life, but he referred to the Bible on the very first meeting with them. Later incidents showed their leanings toward Christianity and the teachings of Jesus Christ. Some of Sri Ramakrishna's visions were prophetic. Before Rakhal, who later became Swami Brahmananda, came to him, the Divine Mother presented to him a young boy, and said, "This is your spiritual son." When Swami Brahmananda came to him at the age of nineteen, Sri Ramakrishna at once recognized him.

When Swami Vivekananda first came to Sri Ramakrishna he could not believe in all these experiences. He thought they were all hallucinations. But, Sri Ramakrishna said, "But they tally. They are objectively verified." How could it be possible? Can hallucinations transform a person? Can hallucination remove our weaknesses? There must be another class of experiences, however abnormal they appear to be, which cannot be classified with mental aberrations. They are apparently normal, but really supernormal. Sri Ramakrishna had experiences which were symbolic of spiritual truths. One day he saw a very fascinating woman come out of the Ganges; she gave birth

to a child, fondled the child, and later devoured the child. This conveyed to him the meaning of the Divine Energy known as Maya, which is symbolic of the relative existence, which holds the relativity of good and evil, of pain and pleasure, of knowledge and ignorance, of bondage and freedom, since both are within the realm of Maya.

Each and every individual is intrinsically pure and perfect and free. Why should we struggle for freedom? The very fact that we have to struggle for it proves that we have not realized our true nature. Bondage and freedom, both, fall within the realm of Maya. Then he (Sri Ramakrishna) began thinking of esoteric powers, miraculous powers. He saw a fallen woman covered with filth, and he, at once, realized that these powers had no value in spiritual life. They may be valuable from the worldly standpoint, but not from the spiritual.

These experiences are not an infallible test of spirituality. A person may have these experiences and yet he may not show real progress in inner life. The real test of spirituality is the upliftment of the mind, its purification, steadiness, and enlightenment. If that is lacking, and still a person says he has strange experiences, know that these are not spiritual experiences in the true sense. The real test of spirituality is

the upliftment of the mind. Sri Ramakrishna used to say that if the mind is really purified and devoted to God, it will constantly turn towards God, just as the needle of a mariner's compass always turns toward the pole star. Similarly, a devotee's heart will always turn toward God. This constant fluctuation of love and hatred, of pain and pleasure, of good and evil, stops. There is an equable state of the mind, a constant experience of poise and peace. With the advancement in spiritual life, a person will feel the steadiness of the mind, enlightenment of the mind, strength of the mind. That is the real test of spiritual advancement.

I recall one incident many years ago when I was at our headquarters at Belur Math. I had come on a visit as I was living then at one of the branch centers. I would go, as was the custom, every morning after meditation to the main shrine. Those who were permanent residents would go to the shrine and meditate in an adjoining room, which was small, and which was the old temple. After my meditation I went to the main shrine to bow down, to make an offering, such as a flower, or incense. Then I would pay my respects to the senior monks. I came to Swami Akhandananda, who was the youngest disciple of the Master. He was ill at the time with

a slight fever. I inquired about his health, and he said that his fever was gone, but it had done him some good. When I enquired what good it had done him, he said that he felt quite distinct from the body. Sri Ramakrishna had said that a highly developed, spiritual person lives in the body, but aloof from it, just as a dry coconut when the kernal becomes separated from the shell. If you move it, it makes a sound. He said he had never felt that way previously, but now he felt that he was really not the physical body, that he was pure spirit dwelling in the physical body. I told him that it was no wonder that he felt that way, he was the blessed child of Sri Ramakrishna, and all the scriptures say a man should not be identified with the body. He said that he knew that very well, but he had never felt it so definitely. Then I asked if it was due to some experience, did he have a vision of Sri Ramakrishna or any other deity? No experience, just from inside he was feeling this way. Then he said that he did not think very much of spiritual visions and ecstasies, they are temporal things, after all. He said he wanted a permanent upliftment of the mind, a complete transformation of the thought-current. What is the character of the permanent inflow of the mind, that is to be seen? I received the impression that this

experience was a permanent possession with him.

These spiritual experiences should not always be sought for as ideals in themselves. The ideal is far beyond. As the mind progresses toward the spiritual ideal, these spiritual experiences must be indicative of spiritual advancement. One should not rest there, however, because the real aim of spiritual life is the direct experience of God.

These temporary visions one may lose. They will leave certain good impressions on the mind, there is no question about it. As you become more and more convinced of the spiritual truths, one should not be satisfied with these visions and other expėriences, even though they are genuine. The direct experience comes in a state of samadhi.

There are two kinds of samadhi: nirvikalpa samadhi, and savikalpa samadhi. This innermost self is experienced as expansive, enfolding everything, engulfing everything. One realizes one's deepest unity with this innermost self and the Supreme Reality. God is, truly speaking, the all-pervading Self of the universe, the Reality that penetrates everything, which is not penetrated by anything, and that Reality is shining within every individual as Pure

Consciousness; that is the central fact in a living being, and this is the reality in each individual. That reality is not confined within the mind. It is like a circle whose circumference is nowhere, but whose centre is here. That same reality is in every atom in the universe. That which is real in an atom is real in you.

What is real in you? This centre of consciousness. That is the source of your life, that is the basis of all your functions. The eyes see because of this light of consciousness; the ears hear because of this light of consciousness; the mouth speaks because of this light of consciousness, the hands work because of this light of consciousness; the legs move because of this light of consciousness. The moment this light is withdrawn all activities stop. Just a bit of consciousness is still reflected in this physical system, and the autonomous functions continue. When consciousness further recedes from the mind, not even dream is experienced, you go beyond dream. In the deep sleep state the mind completely ceases to function, because all its operations are due to the presence of consciousness, and when that consciousness recedes farther, the mind ceases to function. The mind is enveloped in darkness, completely featureless. It experiences no imagination, no feeling, no will,

no thought, no idea, not even this I-consciousness which is nearly always with us.

In the dream state there is some kind of I-consciousness, you impersonate something, whatever it may be, but in deep sleep state there is not that I-consciousness, yet, this is experienced as a state of complete inapprehension, because consciousness persists in that state as the passive witness of that passive condition of the mind. Something similar to this happens in the state of samadhi. It is an experience beyond the duality of the subject and object. In that state the mind is completely suffused with the light of the Supreme Spirit. It engulfs all the features of the mind. Just as in the deep sleep state an unspecified darkness and ignorance prevails, similarly, in samadhi formless, undivided, featureless, integral consciousness prevails as light that absorbs everything, limitless light. Just as you come back from that experience of sleep, similarly, a person may come back from that experience of samadhi to this plane of duality.

In the savikalpa samadhi the feeling of distinction persists; a person realizes his deepest relationship with the Divinity, and a relationship implies some kind of distinction between the related. In the nirvikalpa samadhi all distinction is lost. When a person has this experience it is

an experience of the all-pervading Self. When he comes back to this individual consciousness he does not lose sight of that all-pervading Reality. The experience of God is always with him. Through all this multiplicity he perceives the unity of experience, and that is the Reality. We never know the fundamental reality, even as most scientists will tell you that the fundamental reality is beyond the grasp of the senses. Even our power of reasoning fails to grasp that. Speculation after all, you can conjecture, is a kind of guesswork. Through speculation you cannot see exactly what is underlying the universe. The nineteenth century scientists thought they had caught hold of reality. But Eddington clearly states that one of the greatest advancements of science in the modern age is the recognition of the fact that science deals only with the appearance of reality, and not with the Reality itself.

Vedanta declares if we could experience it we shall experience it as one with this conscious spirit, the all-pervading Reality. We always experience the form but never the reality behind the form. Whether you see the atom or the constituents of an atom, whatever you see is a form, you are always dealing with forms and never with reality. So this is said to be the highest ideal, the highest aim of religion.

A person may have spiritual visions and ecstasies, and they are welcome as long as they indicate some progress or upliftment of the mind, some real transformation of the mind, some sanctification of the mind, but one should not hanker after them. Go forward. It is also noted there are spiritual aspirants who, at a certain stage, experience visions, and then as they go forward, these stop. It also has been noted there are many spiritual aspirants who do not have these experiences. Therefore, experiences cannot be taken as the sure test or measure of spiritual progress.

Some of Sri Ramakrishna's disciples, particularly the lay disciples, used to have many spiritual experiences, such as ecstatic or rapturous moods when devotional songs were sung in chorus, and tears would flow down their cheeks. The monastic disciples who at that time were very young, felt depressed that they could not have such experiences. Their practices felt so dry. They complained to Sri Ramakrishna, who said, "Don't be anxious. This is not the whole of spiritual life. Continue your spiritual practice, steadily, with devotion and faith, and you will have whatever you need. You see, these experiences are not the true measure of spiritual progress. There are some minds that cannot contain too much. If they have some kind of joy they at once express it, or if

they have some kind of spiritual enlightenment, they talk about it. They think too much of a little spiritual attainment."

If an elephant enters a small pool, it creates a great commotion. If the same elephant enters a very large lake, very little change is made in that lake. Sri Ramakrishna seldom encouraged anyone to have these experiences.

Swami Saradananda has written about these experiences. "What the people in general do not experience is called by us an abnormal state. But the subtle experience of the spiritual world can never be objects of knowledge of the ordinary human mind. Such experiences require instruction, training, constant practice, etc. The extraordinary visions and experiences make the spiritual aspirant pure, and gradually make him fit for realizing eternal peace, by filling him every day with new vigour and ideals. Is it then reasonable to call these visions and experiences abnormal?

Everyone has to admit the fact that all abnormalities, without exception, make men weak and bring about a deterioration of their intellectual and other powers. As the result of the vision and experiences of the spiritual world quite the opposite of deterioration takes place. It must be admitted that the cause of all these is also

opposite. (When the effect is different, the cause also must be different). Therefore, these cannot be called diseases or derangements of the brain. It is through these visions that special spiritual experiences have always been gained. A man cannot be fit to realize the eternal peace until he reaches the nirvikalpa state through the cessation of all mental modifications and the nondual state of consciousness becomes natural to him. As an example of this, Sri Ramakrishna used to say, "When a thorn runs into the body, one has to take it out by means of another, then throw both away." All the doctrines, experiences, and visions of the spiritual world without exception, help man to go forward towards that goal. Swami Vivekananda often said that these visions and experiences indicated how far the aspirant had gone forward towards the goal. He called them the "milestones on the way to progress." Therefore, let not the reader think that when there is a little intensity of a particular spiritual food, or the vision of the forms of one or two deities arises through meditation, spiritual realization has reached its culmination. In that case he will fall into a great error. Falling into this kind of error in the religious world, spiritual aspirants miss the goal, become "one-idea'd" and are filled with hatred and animosity toward one another. If a

man makes the error in cultivating devotion to God, he becomes fanatical and bigoted. It is this defect which is the great thorn in the path of devotion, and is born of the "mean and narrow-minded."

Again, taking such vision to be the whole of religion, many come to the wrong conclusion that one who has not had such experiences is not at all religious. Spirituality and aimless miracle-mongering seem to be the same thing; but this kind of hankering does not make man religious, on the contrary, it makes him weaker daily in all respects. That which does not lead to steadfastness and strength of character, that which does not enable man to take his stand on the rock of purity for the sake of truth in defiance of the whole world, or that which entangles him more and more in various kinds of desires instead of setting him free from them, is outside the realm of spirituality.

If extraordinary visions, etc., have not produced such results in your life, and, nevertheless, you are having those visions, know that you are still outside the realm of spirituality, and that they are due to a diseased brain, and so are of no value. If, on the other hand, instead of having wonderful visions and experiences, you find yourself acquiring strength, know for

certain that you are on the right path, and that you will also have these visions and experiences at the proper time.

As a person continues to move toward the goal, these visions stop, therefore, they should be properly evaluated. Far greater than these experiences are the inner attainments. However, if a person continues to meditate on God, worship God with faith and devotion, he ultimately realizes God. God, out of His compassion, appears to a devotee in the very form in which the devotee meditates, but the appearing of God in form, or experiencing God through a form in a particular place, or at a particular time is not the ultimate end of religious life. God has to be perceived as the pervading reality. One should move forward towards that goal. Once that experience comes God can never be lost sight of.

A devotee who had been visiting the Master for some time discovered that some of the other devotees were experiencing ecstatic states of mind, while he had not had any such states of mind. He became much perturbed and went to the Master with tears in his eyes and laid bare to him the distress of his heart. Sri Ramakrishna consoled him, "Do not be silly, my child. Do you think everything is gained when that is attained? Is it something very big? Know

for certain that true faith and renunciation are far greater. Narendra (Swami Vivekananda) does not generally have these, but just see how great is his renunciation, how great is his vigour and steadfastness."

On one occasion one of the young disciples came to Sri Ramakrishna and insisted on having some experience. He wanted Sri Ramakrishna's blessing. Sri Ramakrishna said, "Wait, you have very far to go. Continue your spiritual practice and in course of time you will have everything." This did not satisfy the young and yearning heart. One morning he followed Sri Ramakrishna who was going to the Kali temple. In front of the shrine there was an assembly hall. In many temples the assembly hall and the shrine are connected by a corridor, but this was not so at Dakshineswar.

Sri Ramakrishna went into the inner shrine and this young disciple went into the assembly hall and sat down for meditation. After a little while he noticed that a very resplendent orb of light was coming out of the shrine towards him. It was far more resplendent than the sun. It was rushing toward him, and he felt he was going to be completely engulfed. He was frightened. He left the seat and at once ran to Sri Ramakrishna's room. The Master had not yet returned from the shrine. The disciple sat there quietly. After a little

while Sri Ramakrishna returned and said, "You went to the assembly hall for meditation, why did you come back so soon?" The disciple answered, "I had this strange experience." "You see, I told you that they have their time and place. You should not be anxious for these spiritual experiences."

More important than these experiences and temporary ecstatic moods is the permanent upliftment or the mind, the real sanctification of the mind, the illumination of the mind. One should look for that and continue the spiritual practice. In course of time, one is sure to be blessed with the direct perception of God, the Supreme Reality.

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